

SAMUEL BECKETT'S EARLY FICTION AND DRAMA:
A STUDY OF ARTISTIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Though Beckett is best known for Waiting for Godot, his first published work was not a play but a critical essay. That essay, "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" (1929), a defence of Joyce's "Work in Progress," was the first of a number of occasional essays and reviews he was to write over the next quarter century. Beckett's main ambition during this period was to establish himself as a creative writer; he did not set out to develop a literary aesthetic. Nevertheless, there emerges from these occasional pieces a consistent theory about the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge, a theory he puts into practice in his early fiction and drama.

What Beckett argues in the essays, in essence, is that absolute knowledge lies beyond human reach, and that art must reflect this. If the human artist were possessed of the omniscience and omnipotence of God, he would be able not only to mirror in art the infinite complexity of the world at large, but to devise a succession of works independent of anything previously created. It is because the artist's knowledge and power are limited that he is able only to hint at the world's complexity in works that derive, inevitably, from earlier art.

Thus, in his first (as yet unpublished) novel, "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," Beckett uses Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women, Tennyson's "A Dream of Fair Women," and Henry Williamson's The Dream of Fair Women: a Tale of Youth After the Great War as points of

departure for the creation of an original novel concerned with the impossibility of making sense of the complexity of life. Similarly, in the novel that follows it, More Pricks Than Kicks, he draws on the comic epic form pioneered by Fielding to present us with a modern innovation: a comic epic of relativism designed to demonstrate that absolute knowledge is unattainable. Subsequently, in Murphy, Watt, the Nouvelles and Mercier and Camier, Beckett makes it clear that there can be no definitive answers to either metaphysical or epistemological questions; while in his trilogy of novels, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable, he demonstrates that it is impossible to know anything with absolute certainty about the human mind.

Between Malone Dies and The Unnamable, Beckett wrote his first major play, Waiting for Godot, which focuses, like the novels that precede and the stage plays that follow it, on the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge. As we read the novels in the order in which Beckett wrote them, we become aware of his increasing sophistication in respect of artistic form. This is also the case when we read the plays, and what is especially interesting about them is his experimentation with what can be done not only on stage, but on radio, television and film, to demonstrate the implications of the fact that human knowledge is limited.

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Berkeley, and Schopenhauer." Chapter Eleven has been published as two articles: "Madness and Mysticism in Beckett's Not I," AUMLA, 55 (May 1981), 91-101, and "The Shape of Ideas: That Time and Footfalls," in Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan/ New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 115-35. Appendix One is forthcoming as "A Note on the Ladder Joke in Watt," Journal of Beckett Studies, 13 [1988].

Chapters One, Four, Five and Seven of the present thesis have been reworked from Chapters One, Two, Three and Four, respectively, of my 1974 University of Keele M.A. thesis. The remaining chapters are wholly unrelated to the earlier thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORY AND PRACTICE: BECKETT, JOYCE, AND PROUST

1

Though Beckett is best known for Waiting for Godot, he began his career as a writer not with a play but a critical essay. That essay, "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" (1929), a defence of Joyce's "Work in Progress," was the first of a number of occasional essays and reviews he was to write over the next quarter century.¹

Beckett's main ambition during this period was to establish himself as a novelist and poet, not as a literary theorist or journalist: he wrote his essay on "Work in Progress" at Joyce's request, and an essay on Proust a year later for the sake of advancing what turned out to be an abortive academic career. He agreed to write the other essays and reviews either to publicise the work of friends or to supplement a meagre income; he did not set out to develop a literary aesthetic. Nevertheless, there emerges from these occasional pieces a consistent theory about the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge, a theory he puts into practice in his early fiction and drama.

Beckett's earliest essays, on Joyce and Proust, are of special interest in that they reveal what he thought, as an aspiring young writer, of two of this century's greatest novelists. Beckett first met Joyce in Paris in the autumn of 1928, about a year after graduating from Trinity College, Dublin with a degree in modern

languages.² "Work in Progress" (later Finnegans Wake) had been appearing serially in little magazines for some years by then, and Joyce had decided to bring out a collection of essays in answer to some of the negative criticisms that had been made of it.³ Impressed with Beckett's knowledge of Dante, Joyce asked him to contribute an essay on the role played in "Work in Progress" by Dante, Bruno and Vico. Beckett had studied Dante at Trinity, but was not familiar with the other two writers, and therefore began by reading their work and discussing it with Joyce. From their conversations it emerged that Joyce wanted him to demonstrate that "Work in Progress" owed a great deal to the three Italians, but was nonetheless a highly original work of art.⁴ The actual writing of the essay was, however, left to Beckett, and it was probably his own decision to consider Joyce's originality with reference to the larger question of the relationship between artistic form and the limits of human knowledge.

As "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" makes clear, Beckett finds in Joyce an author preoccupied with the question of whether there are any underlying principles of order in the world at large. "Work in Progress" draws attention to the existence of various numerical coincidences—to the fact that there are, for example, "four legs to a table, and four to a horse, and four seasons and four Gospels and four Provinces in Ireland, . . . twelve Tables of the Law, and twelve Apostles and twelve months and twelve Napoleonic marshals and twelve men in Florence called Ottolenghi"—because Joyce is "conscious that things with a common numerical characteristic tend towards a very significant interrelationship" (J, p. 32). If the significance of the interrelationship of things with a common numerical characteristic were to be taken seriously, and could be

established with absolute certainty, we might find that the world is governed by some sort of ordering principle. But two insuperable problems stand in the way of discovering that principle--problems to which Beckett refers only obliquely. "[Joyce] cannot tell you," he says, addressing the reader, "[why numerical coincidences exist] because he is not God Almighty, but in a thousand years he will tell you, and in the meantime must be content to know why horses have not five legs nor three" (J, p. 32).

Though the question of the interrelationship of numbers is no more than tangentially philosophical, the problems it gives rise to are in essence the same ones a philosopher would face in trying to form an accurate picture of the world at large. In order to formulate an absolutely certain account of the significance of universal numerical coincidence, it would be necessary to begin by compiling a list of all the coincidences of all the numbers in the number system. A theory put forward to explain a list of, say, a hundred coincidences of the number four might be valid for that list, but it would not necessarily be valid for all the other coincidences of the number four, and it would go only a small way towards accounting for all the coincidences of all the numbers there are. But compiling a list of all the coincidences there are is beyond human capability, for the list would extend to infinite length and would take an eternity to complete. Only an omniscient God would be equal to the task.

This is the first problem. The second is that, even if the list were compiled, another task would remain which could only be performed by God: that of making sense of an infinite quantity of data. When Beckett claims that Joyce could solve both problems given

a thousand years, he is exaggerating for the sake of emphasising Joyce's superiority to the reading public. In the same vein is his comment elsewhere in the essay that readers who do not understand "Work in Progress" are "too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. This rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of intellectual salivation" (J, p. 26).⁵

It is because the problems of assembling an infinite quantity of data about any given question and of interpreting it accurately are ultimately insoluble that philosophers can say of the world not that it is either orderly or random, but only that it is infinitely complex. Despite his admiration for Joyce, Beckett is obliged to admit that he (Joyce) is neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and that he is therefore incapable of fashioning a work as complex and unique as the world at large. Like such earlier figures as Dante, Bruno and Vico, he can only hint at the world's complexity in his writing, and can only be original in a limited, though impressive, sense.

Beckett reminds us that Dante created a synthetic language from the various dialects of Italy for use in The Divine Comedy; that Bruno devised an original theory about the coincidence of contraries; and that Vico argued in a new and interesting way that history is circular. Yet none of these writers worked in a cultural vacuum: Dante made use of the current vernacular in devising his new language, and Vico evolved his theory of history from Bruno, whose own ideas derive from ancient Greek philosophy. The sense in which

the three Italians can be said to be original is that each made innovative use of received materials.

Joyce, Beckett emphasises, is original in the same sense. "Work in Progress" is modelled on Dante in that its language is a multilingual synthesis, and on Vico in that it is structurally circular. Its structure arises from "an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction," and this, says Beckett, is "pure Vico, and Vico applied to the problem of style" (J, p. 29). Yet he is careful to point out that Joyce's interest is in the shape of Vico's theory, rather than in its content: "Work in Progress" is structurally circular because circularity suits Joyce's purposes, and not because it is meant to elucidate or expound Viconian theory.

Dante and Vico come together in the "purgatorial aspect" (J, p. 29) of "Work in Progress"--in the fact that it is a work characterised by the "absolute absence of the Absolute" (J, p. 33). According to Beckett, Joyce presents life on Earth as a perpetual struggle between Vice and Virtue--between large pairs of "contrary human factors" (J, p. 33). So equally matched are these factors that neither will ever predominate: Earth is purgatorial in the sense of being a mean between Heaven, which is wholly Virtuous, and Hell, which is wholly Vicious. But whereas Dante's Mount of Purgatory spirals upward, culminating in Paradise, "Work in Progress" eschews culmination. Its structural circles mirror in language the circular flood of "movement and vitality" (J, p. 33) continually issuing from the conflict of two moral extremes.

Joyce thus rejects the notion of human perfectibility. Virtue may predominate temporarily over Vice in "Work in Progress," as in the world at large, but it will never achieve final victory.

Moreover, the struggle between Vice and Virtue is unaffected by any supernatural power. In Vico the course of history is guided through its recurrent cycle by Providence, a force partly human and partly divine. Providence, Beckett argues, is at the centre of the structural circles in "Work in Progress"; but here it is merely a "human institution" (J, p. 23), a concept men have invented to give meaning to events. Alternations in the predominance of Vice and Virtue are for Joyce strictly representative of trends in human behaviour: his use of Providence in the work as a mere "structural convenience" (J, p. 22) is a mark of his scepticism about the existence of God.

Joyce's scepticism is implicitly linked in the essay to the question of whether the world is essentially orderly. In the absence of absolute knowledge of the world around us, Beckett suggests, it is impossible for a writer as intelligent as Joyce to believe either in God or in the notion that God is guiding humanity towards a state of perfection. At another remove, the essay tells us something about the kind of writer Beckett intended to become, and indeed, did become when he started writing novels and plays himself. Asked by Harold Hobson in 1956 why, as a nonbeliever, he was so preoccupied in Waiting for Godot with the two thieves crucified with Christ, Beckett replied: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters."⁶

Godot mirrors the antithetical shape of the sentence from Augustine in a number of ways. The play is in two acts, and presents two characters--Vladimir and Estragon--awaiting the arrival of the mysterious Godot. They are visited by two other characters: Pozzo, who is blessed with wealth; and Lucky, who is condemned to poverty. The English version of the play is subtitled "a tragicomedy in two acts," and thereby invites us to ponder the tragedy of the characters' situation and the comedy of their response to it. By way of such dualities as these, Beckett raises the question of whether modern man should or should not believe in divine salvation, and with Godot's nonarrival, strongly hints that he should not.

Beckett's preoccupation with the shape of ideas clearly parallels Joyce's use of Vico for structural purposes in "Work in Progress": both in Joyce and in Waiting for Godot an earlier text provides the basis for an original work expressive of scepticism about the existence and behaviour of God. Godot is in this sense typical of much of Beckett's writing. In as early a text as More Pricks Than Kicks and in plays as late as All That Fall and Not I, Biblical passages serve as points of departure for works that question religious belief.⁷

Beckett's concern with originality also relates to style. In the opening lines of "Text," an extract from his otherwise unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" (1932), Beckett writes in a style reminiscent of "Work in Progress": "Come come and cull me bonny bony doublebed cony swiftly my springal and my thin Kerry twingle-twangler comfort my days of roses . . . "⁸ Yet a passage like this is exceptional, for although Beckett often echoes Joyce in his writing, particularly in his early fiction, "Text" is one of the

few works in which he deliberately imitates him. In an interview with Israel Shenker in 1956, Beckett commented that

Joyce was a superb manipulator of material--perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn't a syllable that's superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past . . . I think anyone nowadays, who pays the slightest attention to his experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er [somebody who cannot]. The other type of artist--the Apollonian--is absolutely foreign to me.⁹

Implicit here is Beckett's admiration for Joyce's wide reading, keen observation of everyday life, and talent for translating his observations and reading into his fiction. The more Joyce learned, the more he could include in "Work in Progress," which in Beckett's view was ultimately intended to be a highly complex counterpart to the world at large. Its complexity was to derive partly from its wide-ranging allusions and partly from its sophistication of language: its wealth of neologisms and multilingual puns was meant to render it insusceptible to definitive interpretation. Yet Beckett could see that it would never be a wholly satisfactory image of the world, because it would never be infinitely complex. Clearly, an infinitely complex work could only be written by an author possessed of omniscience and omnipotence; seeing the pointlessness of trying to imitate Joyce in his self-styled role as artistic God of creation, Beckett decided while still a young man that "Work in Progress" represented an artistic tendency he must reject.

His decision to make "impotence and ignorance" the materials of his art--a decision reflected in his early fiction--was probably strengthened by the reading he started to do in 1929. Beckett had

not studied philosophy at Trinity, but while still in Paris he began reading Descartes for a research paper he planned to write but never in fact completed.¹⁰ He was attracted to Descartes' interest in the limits of human knowledge and his scepticism about established metaphysical systems, for in the Meditations, as in The Discourse on Method, the basis of all Descartes' speculations is doubt. Beckett also became interested in Geulincx, Spinoza and Kant, but was especially drawn to Schopenhauer, whose style, opinions about the nature of man, and approach to epistemology impressed him deeply.¹¹ His interest in Schopenhauer may have been sparked by an editorial in transition in praise of the German philosopher;¹² in any case it is certain that Schopenhauer influenced his attitude to Proust, the subject of his next essay.

2

Beckett completed his essay on Joyce while serving a two-year term as lecteur at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, and began work on "Proust," which he had been commissioned to write for inclusion in Chatto & Windus' Dolphin Book Series, in 1930, before returning to Trinity College and a lectureship in French.¹³ Writing "Proust" was meant to help launch his new career; he started enthusiastically, but soon became impatient with the task of criticism, and finally wrote what he himself has described as an "angry" work.¹⁴ In the "Foreword" he warns that there will be "no allusion" in his essay "to the legendary life and death of Marcel Proust, nor to the garrulous old dowager of the Letters, nor to the poet, nor the the author of the Essays, nor to the Eau de Selzian

correlative of Carlyle's 'beautiful bottle of soda-water' . . . The references are to the abominable edition of the Nouvelle Revue Française, in sixteen volumes" (P, p. [9]).

Here Beckett's anger is directed not only at a faulty edition, but at the kind of criticism that would regard information about an author's life, minor writings and translations as being important. It is directed, too, at the reader, who must either rise to the level of serious art (his first test being to recognise the allusion to Ruskin in the "Foreword")¹⁵ or sink back (in Beckett's view) into his usual attitude of complacent incomprehension. Though the Dolphin Books Series was intended for middlebrow readers, "Proust" is aggressively difficult in style and seriously underargued.¹⁶ Only from careful study of the essay does it emerge that Beckett's overall aim is to demonstrate that A la recherche du temps perdu is an original adaptation to fiction of Schopenhauer's theory of music.¹⁷ More complex and philosophically sophisticated than "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," "Proust" indirectly reveals a great deal about Beckett's approach to form and characterisation, since both arise from his interest in the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

It is characteristic of Beckett's approach to his subject that he mentions Schopenhauer's theory of music for the first time near the end of the essay, observing that "Schopenhauer rejects the Leibnitzian view of music as 'occult arithmetic,' and in his aesthetics separates it from the other arts, which can only produce the Idea with its concomitant phenomena, whereas music is the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in Space but in Time only. . . ." (P,

pp. 91-92). It is also characteristic that he neglects to tell us, either here or elsewhere in the essay, what Schopenhauer means by "Idea," and why it is significant that the Idea is apprehended solely in time. These are important omissions, for at the start of the essay Beckett emphasises that Proust's narrator, in planning his novel in Le Temps retrouvé, devotes special attention to the roles space, time and causality will play in it.

He is aware of the many concessions required of the literary artist by the shortcomings of the literary convention. As a writer he is not altogether at liberty to detach effect from cause. . . . But he will refuse to extend his submission to spatial scales, he will refuse to measure the length and weight of man in terms of his body instead of in terms of his years. In the closing words of his book he states his position: 'But were I granted time to accomplish my work, I would not fail to stamp it with the seal of that Time, now so forcibly present to my mind, and in it I would describe men, even at the risk of giving them the appearance of monstrous beings, as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space. . . .' (P, pp. 11-12)

Here, in the opening pages of "Proust," Beckett establishes that the narrator's projected novel is to be self-consciously temporal. In essence, the rest of his argument is that, like Schopenhauerian music, the projected novel (the novel we know as A la recherche du temps perdu) is intended to be a temporal embodiment of the atemporal Ideas. This would be more immediately obvious but for the obliqueness of Beckett's style and his failure to provide a background discussion of Schopenhauer's epistemological theory, the foundation of his theory of music.

Schopenhauer begins by arguing that our image of the world arises from the mind's organisation of sense data. In every act of perception, the mind treats sense data as effect and tries to explain the cause by ordering the data within a spatiotemporal framework.

Space, time and causality are the three "forms" of perception without which sense data would remain in undifferentiated confusion.¹⁸

We may think that the world is no more than "idea"--that is, sense data perceived under the forms--but at the heart of everything in nature, Schopenhauer argues, is an imperceptible striving force, a force he refers to as "will." The whole world is objectified will: will resides in all animate and inanimate objects and is responsible for their phenomenal characteristics. It exists in man as the will to live--the will to survive, propagate, seek pleasure and avoid pain--and objectifies itself in our bodies. "Teeth, throat, and bowels," says Schopenhauer, "are objectified hunger; the organs of generation are objectified sexual desire; the grasping hand, the hurrying feet, correspond to the more indirect desires of the will which they express."¹⁹ Each individual's will "tinges the objects of knowledge with its colour" (WWI, II, 336): we may be in agreement about the identity of various objects in the world around us--we all agree that the cause of these sensations is, for example, a man and of those, a tree--but each individual's view of the world is to an extent subjective inasmuch as it is coloured by personal, will-motivated desires.

For Proust as for Schopenhauer, perception is a matter of referring sense data back to their cause. But whereas Schopenhauer believes the mind always makes use of all the data presented to it, according to Proust it is only in new or unfamiliar situations that all the data are taken into account. In familiar situations the will to enjoy pleasure and avoid pain, referred to in "Proust" as "Habit," intervenes in the act of forming perceptual images to ensure that psychologically unpleasant elements are excluded.

Habit limits the extent of our knowledge about the world at large by acting as a screen between us and unpleasantness in the everyday world, or rather as a series of screens, since changes of environment expose us to different sense data and require us to adapt. With each adaptation, the individual experiences a change of personality in the sense that his view of the world changes, and with it, the nature of his desires. It is here that Habit makes a mockery of us. The individual who undergoes a change of environment is not the same person today, after the change, as he was yesterday; and in consequence, he is today dissatisfied with the object he longed for the day before. "For subject B," writes Beckett, "to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A"--the person he was earlier--"is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner" (P, p. 14). In the absence of change of environment, we fall prey to boredom: Habit performs efficiently, and our sensory experience cloyes. But in the "periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations" (P, p. 19)--in the intervals between Habit's changes of screen--we suffer because we are presented, harshly, with an uncensored view of the world.

Willing perception provides us with a partly subjective image of the world as idea--the world as a manifestation of will. Of greater interest to Schopenhauer than will's manifestation is will itself; but will is by definition aspatial, acausal and atemporal: if we wish to investigate it, we must somehow transcend the forms. Schopenhauer considers it possible to achieve limited transcendence--transcendence of time--through aesthetic contemplation.

What distinguishes aesthetic contemplation from ordinary perception is that the former is independent of will-motivated considerations. Perceiving an object in nature is a matter of noting various spatiotemporal relationships, ultimately in the interest of alerting oneself to possible sources of danger or pain. But if circumstances are such that an individual can lose himself in the disinterested contemplation of a work of art, forgetful of considerations of will, he will undergo a transfiguration. He will cease to be a will-motivated subject and become, mystically, a "pure, will-less . . . timeless subject of knowledge" (WWI, I, 231), at one with the object of contemplation. Correspondingly, the object will cease for him to be mere idea and become a more direct objectification of will, "Idea."

Viewed as "idea" by a will-motivated perceiver, an individual object--whether animal, vegetable or mineral--is merely a phenomenon defined by the forms. Inasmuch as it is perceived under all three forms, it is an indirect objectification of will.²⁰ Viewed as "Idea" by a will-less subject, the object appears as a timeless representative of its species: perceived under only two forms, it is a direct objectification of will. Instead of being an "object of opinion based on sensation" (WWI, I, 222), it is a step closer to being will itself; it is an atemporal object of "true knowledge" (WWI, I, 221). If the object is a human being, the will-less subject will discern the "special Idea" (WWI, I, 207) within him: the Idea expressive not of his archetypal human qualities, but of his innermost character--the will's unique manifestation in him.

In A la recherche du temps perdu the narrator's search for a means of discovering the Ideas is conducted by a process of trial and

error, and it is only in the closing pages of the novel that he is able to formulate the problem he has been trying all his life to solve. In Le Temps retrouvé he discovers that we are all slaves of the will to live; or, to put it another way, that we are all creatures of Habit. Habit governs the view we take of the present, and for the most part, of the past as well: our every voluntary (that is, willing) memory is of "impressions . . . that were consciously and intelligently formed" (P, p. 32)--impressions from which Habit has abstracted any element of "anxiety" (P, p. 32). In other words, our memories of the past are as much coloured by will as our image of the present, and--bearing in mind that we normally contemplate the future "in the haze of our smug will to live" (P, p. 15)--our concept of the future as well. How, asks the narrator, is it possible to apprehend the timeless Ideas, given that our image of past, present and future is always of the world as idea and is almost always censored by Habit? "[The] germ of the . . . solution," says Beckett, "is contained in the statement of the problem itself" (P, p. 36): the apprehension of Being must take place outside time and in Habit's absence. But how can these conditions be achieved?

From reflection on his own experience, the narrator comes to the conclusion that, although largely motivated by will, human beings have a will-less aspect over which Habit has no influence. When we engage in perception, it is our willing self that becomes aware of the sense data selected by Habit: it knows nothing of the data Habit rejects. Yet the rejected data are not altogether lost, for our will-less aspect--the unchanging "best of our many selves" (P, p. 31)²¹--stores them in metaphoric "vases" (P, p. 73) in our minds. Within the vases, the rejected sensations crystallise around various

"central impression[s]" (P, p. 72); the sensations and impressions are preserved there from the scrutiny of voluntary memory.

But if (for reasons beyond our control) we should experience a brief relaxation of Habit; and if at the same time a central impression similar to one already experienced should fortuitously present itself, we may become entirely will-less and find ourselves engulfed in a cluster of sensations our willing aspect had earlier rejected. The release of these sensations from their "vase" results from a brief mental "participation between" (P, p. 74) the original central impression and the present one. Thus, when in the correct circumstances in adulthood Proust's narrator steeps a bit of madeleine in his tea, that central impression participates with an earlier, similar one and releases to his will-less aspect a cluster of neglected sensations associated with his childhood in Combray. The memory that contemplates neglected sensations in this way--quite independently of the will--Proust terms "involuntary memory."

Beckett does not provide us with a straightforwardly helpful account of what involuntary memory entails. He is clear when he says that in each instance of involuntary memory the cluster of neglected sensations--or total sensation--we experienced in the past is restored: "the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself" (P, p. 72). But he perplexes us with the observation that the total sensation is "at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal" (P, p. 75).²² What he means to say is that the total sensation is not experienced in the original circumstances, but through imagination. Yet it is "empirical" in

that it is present to the subject's will-less aspect in exactly the same form as when originally experienced. It is "real"--i.e., a facet of the reality we daily neglect--but not "merely actual": it does not require for its evocation a reduplication of the scene in which it was first experienced. It is a concrete sensation rather than an abstract concept, yet it is not idea--i.e., sensation perceived under the forms. Instead, it is the perfect or "ideal" reality transcendent of time: the "essential, . . . extratemporal" reality, Idea.

Schopenhauer holds that works of art ought to be representations of will rather than of idea; but because will has no spatial, temporal or causal characteristics, it cannot be represented directly. Painting and sculpture are a compromise: they present us with images of "particular things" (WWI, I, 332)--things in the world as idea--but in such a way as to suggest the artist's experience of them as Ideas: as direct objectifications of will. Music, too, is a compromise, but for Schopenhauer a more satisfactory one. Will is aspatial, acausal and atemporal; yet it manifests itself, paradoxically, in time. Time is the one form that clings to will whenever we think of its action in nature: it is easy to conceive of it as being, like gravity, a force without a beginning or end in time; but it is impossible to imagine it acting--objectifying itself in successive generations of objects--other than temporally. Accordingly, for Schopenhauer, music is the next-to-perfect art form to describe will because it is aspatial and acausal, even if it is not atemporal. Amongst the arts, music is unique in being perceived "in and through time alone, with absolute exclusion of space, and also apart from the influence of the knowledge of causality . . . ;

for the tones make the aesthetic impression as effect . . . without obliging us to go back to their causes. . . ." (WWI, I, 344).

Unlike the visual arts, music does not merely suggest the artist's experience of the Ideas, which are direct objectifications of will; rather it is itself a direct objectification of will. According to Schopenhauer, the lowest tones of the bass objectify the will's activity in inanimate nature; the higher tones, its action in plants and animals; and the melody, the will within human beings.²³ Music is a temporal art; but what the composer directly objectifies in it is the essence of nature, will--a force that has existed, unchanged and unchanging, since the beginning of time. Paradoxically, music embodies the realm of Being within a temporal framework.

Although the characters in A la recherche du temps perdu undergo changes in appearance with the passing of time, Proust presents them to us primarily as direct objectifications of will. Perpetually driven by will, they seem, Beckett says, to "solicit a pure subject [i.e., Proust], so that they may pass from a state of blind will to a state of representation" (P, p. 90). Proust represents them in his novel as Schopenhauerian "special Idea[s]" (WWI, I, 207): he presents them with their "concomitant phenomena" (P, p. 92), but tries to avoid describing them in predominantly spatial and causal terms. His novel captures their innermost character in a temporal medium that, like Schopenhauerian music, is expressive of an atemporal reality.

Beckett is lavish in his praise of Proust's artistry, which he admires on largely Schopenhauerian grounds. Proust's realism, he says, is vastly preferable to that of his contemporaries--the

realists and naturalists who are content merely to "transcribe the surface, the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner" (P, p. 79); Proust delves deeper, into the timeless and universal.²⁴ Where he is obliged to describe his experience of the world as idea, Proust makes every effort to transcend the form of causality: he presents us with a "non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into a chain of cause and effect" (P, p. 86). "The classical artist," by contrast, "assumes omniscience and omnipotence. He raises himself artificially out of Time in order to give relief to his chronology and causality to his development" (P, p. 81).

The phrase "omniscience and omnipotence" returns us to Beckett's rejection of Joyce's classical tendency in the Shenker interview. Clearly, Beckett admires Proust not only as a novelist who has adapted Schopenhauer's theory of music to fiction in an original way, but as an artist who believes that the limitations of ordinary perception make it impossible for us to know everything there is to know about the world at large. While Proust believes it is possible to transcend ordinary perception and glimpse the timeless and universal through the action of involuntary memory, he does not (in Beckett's view) go so far as to claim that these glimpses, once described in an art work, will amount to a definitive comment on the nature of either man or his world.

Thus, although involuntary memory may provide insights into the innermost character of certain individuals, it does not tell us in general terms either how people behave or how they ought to behave. Proust "explain[s] his characters," comments Beckett, ". . . in order that they may appear as they are--inexplicable" (P, p. 87), and he

makes no attempt to suggest in his novel that there exist absolute moral values to which they would do well to adhere.²⁵

It is significant that in his own work Beckett is equally careful to avoid making authoritative statements about human morality or about man and his world more generally. Like Proust, he rejects the conventions of naturalism because he believes that the world that the naturalists mirror in their works--the world we know through perception--is a simplification of what the world is really like. His characters are rarely well-observed in the naturalistic sense; more often than not they are caricatures, figures whose comic grotesquerie implicitly testifies to the impossibility (in Beckett's view) of representing human behaviour accurately in either fiction or drama. His lifelong search as a writer has been for artistic modes that convey to us that both the world and the human mind are infinitely complex.

Much as he admires Schopenhauer, Beckett does not seek in his fiction and drama simply to promote that philosopher's theories. In general, Beckett's writings bear out his comment to an interviewer in 1961 that "There is no key [to my works]. . . . If the subject of my [works] could be explicated in philosophical terms, there wouldn't have been any reason to write them."²⁶ Beckett values originality so highly that none of his works can be said to have been written in direct imitation of Proust, and in any case, there is evidence in "Proust" itself that when he wrote it, he had serious reservations about that key concept, involuntary memory.

At one point in the essay, Beckett quotes approvingly from A la recherche du temps perdu to describe involuntary memory as "'an immediate, total and delicious deflagration'" (P, p. 33) of the mock

reality presented to us by ordinary perception; in the same place, he refers to its opposite, voluntary memory, as though it were "Shadwell, and of Irish extraction" (P, p. 33). But although Beckett's disapproval of voluntary memory is consistently fierce in "Proust," his descriptions of involuntary memory are not always favourable. He comments near the start of the essay, for example, that involuntary memory recurs in Proust as a "neuralgia rather than a theme, persistent and monotonous" (P, p. 35): as a concept, it approaches "intellectualised animism" (P, p. 36); its individual instances are "fetishes" (P, p. 36).

This reference to animism probably derives from a passage in Du côté de chez Swann, in which Proust compares with the Celtic spirits of the dead the material from the past involuntary memory recovers:

Je trouve très raisonnable la croyance celtique que les âmes de ceux que nous avons perdus sont captives dans quelque être inférieur, dans une bête, un végétal, une chose inanimée, perdues en effet pour nous jusqu'au jour, qui pour beaucoup ne vient jamais, où nous nous trouvons passer près de l'arbre, entrer en possession de l'objet qui est leur prison. Alors elles tressaillent, nous appellent, et sitôt que nous les avons reconnues, l'enchantement est brisé. Délivrées par nous, elles ont vaincu la mort et reviennent vivre avec nous.

Il en est ainsi de notre passé. C'est peine perdue que nous cherchions à l'évoquer, tous les efforts de notre intelligence sont inutiles. Il est caché hors de son domaine et de sa portée, en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel) que nous ne soupçonnons pas. (R, I, 44)

Beckett often makes use of religious imagery in his descriptions of involuntary memory, because each instance of it is a transcendent experience like the mystic's experience of union with God. Yet it is clear from terms like "intellectualised animism" and "fetishes" (and from Beckett's condemnation of Chateaubriand and Amiel as a "pair of melancholy Pantheists dancing a fandango of death in the twilight" (P, p. 82)), that Proust's dalliance with the idea that the past may

be embodied spiritually in nature is an unacceptable aspect of his Romanticism.²⁷ From the essay's list of instances of involuntary memory it is also clear that Beckett objects to the banality of some of the places and things that are meant to embody the past. He takes special care to point out, for example, that one of the narrator's experiences of involuntary memory occurs in a lavatory in the Champs-Élysées--a point Arnaud Dandieu, original author of the list, fails to mention.²⁸

Unsurprisingly, involuntary memory does not find a place in Beckett's own fiction and drama. There he takes the view that, while the mystical experience in whatever form may lead to a clearer understanding of the true nature of reality, it may also give rise to spurious clarity. When he alludes to involuntary memory in particular, it is usually to express reservations about it; on the principle that it is wrong simply to take over another writer's ideas, he never claims the concept as his own.²⁹ In an interview with John Gruen in 1970, he stressed that this principle had been suggested to him by Joyce, who "'made me realise artistic integrity.'"³⁰

His essays on Joyce and Proust succeed in demonstrating (albeit on demand in the case of the Joyce essay) that two of the twentieth century's greatest writers found ways of adapting received ideas to their works while still being original. In his own writing, Beckett has striven for originality, too, and has succeeded in distinguishing himself as an artist in his own right rather than simply remaining a disciple to Joyce and Proust. Uppermost in his mind throughout his writing career have been the question of originality and the equally important question of the relationship between art and the limits of

human knowledge. As we shall see, he treats these questions with increasing sophistication in his criticism, fiction and drama.

NOTES

¹"Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" was first published in Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929), pp. [3]-22. It has been reprinted, together with most of Beckett's other essays and reviews, in Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983). All quotations from "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" are from Cohn's edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by J.

²Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 67.

³For details of where and when successive instalments of "Work in Progress" were published, see Richard Ellman, James Joyce (London: Oxford U.P., 1966), pp. 801-03.

⁴Bair, p. 76.

⁵Beckett goes on to suggest, rather cryptically, that when Rebecca West "clears her decks for a sorrowful deprecation of the Narcissistic element in Mr Joyce by the purchase of 3 hats, one feels that she might very well wear her bib at all her intellectual banquets, or alternatively, assert a more noteworthy control over her salivary glands than is possible for Monsieur Pavlov's unfortunate dogs" (J, p. 26). It has hitherto gone unnoticed that this is an attack on West's The Strange Necessity (London: Cape, 1928), which is critical of Joyce's "narcissistic inspiration" (p. 22), and which discusses his writing in largely unfavourable terms with reference to Pavlov's experiments on dogs.

⁶Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year," International Theatre Annual, No. 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), p. 153. Earlier in the interview (p. 153), Beckett reveals that, although raised a Protestant, he lost his faith "after leaving Trinity [College]." See also Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer 1961), 23-24, in which Beckett is quoted as saying: "Once I had a religious emotion. It was at my first Communion. No more."

⁷It is well established that the titles of More Pricks Than Kicks and All That Fall derive from Acts 9.5 and Psalm 145.14, respectively. In Chapter Eleven I demonstrate that the title of Not I is based on St. Paul's repeated comment in his epistles that it is "not I" who write, "but Christ [who] liveth in me." (Galatians 2.20, 1 Corinthians 7.10 and 1 Corinthians 15.10).

⁸"Text," New Review, 2 (April 1932), 57. Rpt. in Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 308.

⁹Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p. 3. In The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 6, S.E. Gontarski comments that Shenker's interview with Beckett is "actually a composite interview," and adds that "[b]ecause of its unidentified and unverified sources and because Beckett considers the material misleading, [it] needs to be approached with some caution. Still, much of the composite Shenker assembles is strongly corroborated by other evidence, principally the artistic struggle Beckett was having in his early years with the dominant aesthetics and psychological influence of Joyce." Gontarski is convincing about the status of the interview because he bases his comments partly on conversations with Beckett and partly on a careful reading of the corroborative sources he mentions here.

¹⁰For a fuller discussion of Beckett's interest in Descartes and for further information about his unfinished research paper, see John Pilling, Samuel Beckett (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 112-14.

¹¹See Pilling, p. 7 and pp. 114-31.

¹²Eugène Jolas, "Notes on Reality," transition, 18 (November 1929), 15-16.

¹³Bair, pp. 106-07. "Proust" was first published by Chatto & Windus as the seventh volume in the Dolphin Books Series (London, 1931). All quotations are from Proust/ Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit (London: John Calder, 1965); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by P.

¹⁴Pilling, p. 14.

¹⁵In "Samuel Beckett as Critic of Proust and Joyce," Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 1977, p. 84, James Terence McQueeney comments that "Carlyle was initially put off by the volubility of his young disciple John Ruskin and his seemingly excessive devotion to art. In letters to his brother John he described Ruskin first as a 'dainty dilettante soul,' and, on another occasion, he referred to Ruskin's personality as 'a bottle of beautiful soda-water.' The Eau de Selzian correlative is thus the analogous Proust-Ruskin discipleship which led to the translations of The Bible of Amiens and Sesame and Lilies." McQueeney's source for this information is Charles R. Sanders, "Carlyle's Letters to Ruskin," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 46 (Sept. 1958), 208-38.

¹⁶That the series was intended for middlebrow readers is evident from some of the other titles--for example, Aldous Huxley's Vulgarity in Literature, Norman Douglas' London Street Games, and George Antheil's The People's Opera. (These titles are given in a publisher's catalogue bound at the end of another book in the series, Thomas McGreevy's Richard Aldington: an Englishman (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931). That Beckett was conscious of the failings of his style in "Proust" is clear from a copy that appeared in a second-hand

bookshop in Dublin several years ago; in Beckett's handwriting on the title page is the comment: "I have written my book in a cheap flashy philosophical jargon" (Bair, p. 109).

¹⁷All quotations from A la recherche du temps perdu are from the Gallimard edition (Paris, 1954); volume and page numbers are given in the text, preceded by R. Since Proust makes only two minor references to Schopenhauer in A la recherche du temps perdu (see R, III, 739 and 992), the novel itself is an unlikely source of inspiration for Beckett's Schopenhauerian approach. As Vera G. Lee has observed (in "Beckett on Proust," Romanic Review, 69 (May 1978), 197) a more probable source is Proust's introduction to his translation of Sesame and Lilies, in which he lavishes praise on The World as Will and Idea, Schopenhauer's major work. John Fletcher has noted (in "Beckett et Proust," Caliban: Annales Publiées par la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse, 1 (January 1964), 98-99), that Beckett makes unacknowledged reference in the essay to two books on Proust, Arnaud Dandieu's Marcel Proust: sa révélation psychologique (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930) and Léon Pierre-Quint's Marcel Proust: sa vie, son oeuvre (Paris: Les Editions du Sagittaire, 1925), and it may have been the latter's brief comparisons of Proust and Schopenhauer that prompted Beckett to investigate their relationship further.

¹⁸See "On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason," in Two Essays by Arthur Schopenhauer, rev. ed. trans. Mme Karl Hillebrand (London: George Bell, 1889), p. 61.

¹⁹The World as Will and Idea, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909), I, 141. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text with the abbreviation WWI.

²⁰See WWI, I, 332-33 for Schopenhauer's distinction between direct and indirect objectifications of will.

²¹In WWI, I, 504, Schopenhauer describes the will-less subject as "our better self."

²²Here Beckett echoes part of a sentence in Le Temps retrouvé: "Mais qu'un bruit, qu'une odeur, déjà entendu ou respirée jadis, le soient de nouveau, à la fois dans le présent et dans le passé réels sans être actuels, idéaux sans être abstraits, aussitôt l'essence permanente et habituellement cachée des choses se trouve libérée, et notre vrai moi qui, parfois depuis longtemps, semblait mort, mais ne l'était pas entièrement, s'éveille, s'anime en recevant la céleste nourriture qui lui est apportée" (R, III, 872-73; italics mine).

²³See WWI, I, 334-35.

²⁴Cf. Schopenhauer's comment that "A novel will be the higher and nobler the more inner and less outer life it depicts; and this relation will accompany every grade of novel as its characteristic sign, from Tristram Shandy down to the crudest and most action-packed romance." ("On Aesthetics," in Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays and

Aphorisms, ed. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p. 165).

²⁵See P, p. 66, where Beckett comments that "Proust is completely detached from all moral considerations. There is no right and wrong in Proust nor in his world." Similarly, on p. 89 of the essay, Beckett notes that Proust's use of botanical imagery to describe his characters "accompanies very naturally his complete indifference to moral values and human justices. Flower and plant have no conscious will. They are shameless, exposing their genitals." This is a direct echo of Schopenhauer, who in WWI, I, 204, says: "... the plant reveals its whole being at the first glance, and with complete innocence, which does not suffer from the fact that it carries its organs of generation exposed to view on its upper surface ..."

²⁶Gabriel d'Aubarède, "En attendant . . . Beckett," Nouvelles Littéraires, (16 February 1961), 7. (My translation). Similarly, Beckett comments in "Proust" that Proust is superior to Baudelaire, for Baudelaire's "'correspondence' is determined by a concept, [and is] therefore strictly limited . . . by its own definition. Proust does not deal in concepts, he pursues the Idea . . . (P, p. 79). Here Beckett echoes a passage in the third volume of The World as Will and Idea: "Whoever . . . is filled with the comprehension of an Idea is justified if he chooses art as the medium of its communication. The mere conception, on the other hand, is something completely determinable, therefore exhaustible, and distinctly thought, the whole content of which can be coldly and dryly expressed in words. . . . [A] work of art which has proceeded from mere distinct conceptions is always ungenuine" (WWI, III, 179-80).

²⁷In Proust's defence it should be pointed out that this passage comes at an early stage in the narrator's development: he eventually learns to search for essences not in the external world but in his own mind. In any case, Proust makes the point in this passage that our past "est caché hors de son domaine et de sa portée, en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel) que nous ne soupçonnons pas." (My italics).

²⁸In "Beckett et Proust," 98, Fletcher points out that Beckett's list of instances of involuntary memory (P, pp. 36-37) is taken from Dandieu's Marcel Proust: sa révélation psychologique (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), p. 31. Item 3 reads: "L'odeur de moisi." Item 3 in Beckett's list appears by contrast as "A musty smell in a public lavatory in the Champs-Élysées" (P, p. 36).

²⁹Nicholas Zurbrugg makes a similar point about Beckett's scepticism about the mystical experience in "From 'Gleam' to 'Gloom': the Volte-Face between the Criticism and Fiction of Samuel Beckett," AUMLA, 55 (May 1981), 27, when he says that "Beckett, like Proust, . . . plainly rejects the limitations of perceptual and verbal conventions, [but] appears uncertain, if not apprehensive, regarding the revelations afforded by the 'mystical experience' [P, p. 35] of descent into the perceptual 'eddy' [P, p. 66]. Indeed, careful examination of Beckett's Proust suggests that he feared the

transition from habitual to inhabitual modes of perception might well be akin to the leap from frying-pan to fire."

³⁰John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett Talks About Beckett," Vogue (February 1970), p. 108.

CHAPTER TWO

"ASSUMPTION" AND "DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN"

1

Written at about the same time as "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," Beckett's first short story, "Assumption," embodies in practice certain features of the theory of art Beckett expounds in his essay.¹ Just as Joyce makes original use of Dante, Bruno and Vico in "Work in Progress" because he lacks the God-like omniscience and omnipotence necessary to create a work of art entirely independent of anything written before it, so Beckett attempts to make original use of Joyce and D.H. Lawrence in "Assumption."

The story's main character is a nameless artist who has developed a variation on Stephen Dedalus' strategy of silence, exile and cunning in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man in order to defend himself against a largely philistine society. He spends much of his time sitting silently in a café frequented by members of "the unread intelligentsia" (A, p. 268); rather than join in their conversation, he remains in self-imposed exile a few tables away, but from time to time, in an exercise of cunning, succeeds in "whispering the turmoil down" (A, p. 268).

"He could have shouted," says Beckett in the story's opening sentence, "and could not. The buffoon in the loft swung steadily on his stick and the organist sat dreaming with his hands in his pockets" (A, p. 268). To shout would be to give expression to his

imagination: in this context, we must remember that it is Stephen Dedalus' "heart's cry" that gives rise to the villanelle in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.² But although the "buffoon in the loft"--the metaphorical "conductor" within himself--swings his baton, the "organist"--the part of himself capable of answering the conductor's gesture with a creative act--fails to respond.³ Though subject to an inner "obligation to express," Beckett's artist/character has found that he has "nothing to express,"⁴ for he is inhibited by the awareness that "the highest art" requires "bombshell perfection" (A, p. 269), perfection he may not be capable of producing. Whispering people down is his substitute for artistic creation, and a poor substitute at that: no "apostolic fervour" (A, p. 269) attaches to it because it is not a part of his Dedalus-like religion of art. Stopping conversations--bringing people "within the wide orbit of his control" (A, p. 269)--is a game he plays in compensation for the fact that, being human, he lacks the omniscience and omnipotence of the ideal artistic God of creation.

In time the urge to shout takes on a life of its own, warring within him against the urge to remain silent. "He felt its implacable caged resentment, its longing to be released in one splendid drunken scream and fused with the cosmic discord. Its struggle for divinity was as real as his own, and as futile" (A, p. 269). Beckett's character "struggle[s] for divinity" in that he aspires to artistic Godhead; the "rebellious surge" (A, p. 269) within him--the urge to shout, rather than to shape his "heart's cry" into a finely-crafted work of art--also aspires to dominance, and is in this sense a Satanic rival. It is in order to defeat the rebel angel within that the artist ceases even to whisper; he finds,

however, that "By damming the stream of whispers he had raised the level of the flood, and he knew the day would come when it could no longer be denied. Still he was silent, in silence listening for the first murmur of the torrent that must destroy him" (A, p. 270).

It is at this point that "the Woman" (the use of a capital "W" suggests that she stands for all women) enters his life. Because her arrival is compared to an "irruption of demons" (A, p. 270), she seems in some way allied to the inner Satanic element that threatens the artist with destruction. In spite of himself, the artist finds her attractive: he is especially drawn to her eyes, which seem to him to be "pools of obscurity" (A, p. 270). This phrase is the first of a number of hints to the reader that what the Woman is offering the character is a heresy of love to rival his own religion of art. For Beckett's description of her eyes recalls not only "the dead, bottomless pools of [Minette's] eyes" in Lawrence's Women in Love,⁵ but also the ultimately destructive heresy practised by some of that novel's characters. One such character, Hermione Roddice, who is described both as a "priestess" and as a "demoniacal ecstatic,"⁶ tries to kill Birkin, the man she loves; another character, Gerald Crich, reflects to himself that it would be "a perfect voluptuous fulfilment" to murder his mistress Gudrun.⁷

When Beckett's artist enters into an affair with the Woman, he initially finds that each of her visits "loosen[s] yet another stone in the clumsy dam [of whispers] set up and sustained by him frightened and corruptible" (A, p. 271). He is aware of having been corrupted by the heresy she practises, and he fears for his safety. Later, however, in a complete reversal of his expectations, she releases him (as he thinks) from the power of the Satanic element

within himself, so that he becomes at one with "the blue flower, Vega, GOD" (A, p. 271).⁸ Since the mystical experience of union with God is often described in erotic terms,⁹ it might appear that the artist's experiences of "ecstasy" with the woman--experiences in which he "die[s] and [is] God" (A, p. 271)--are meant to be spiritual. However, in context it seems more probable that Beckett is describing his character's experience of sexual union in mystical terms for the sake of suggesting cynically--in anticipation of his essay on Proust, where he is cynical about both love and the mystical experience--that his character has abandoned his religion of art for the Woman's heresy of love. The artist believes he has experienced the sexual equivalent of the Virgin Mary's Assumption into heaven (the "Assumption" of the story's title); but the metaphorical heaven on earth to which he is transported has nothing to do with art. Though he imagines that in the Woman's company, he has repeatedly "died" and become God, he has not become an artistic God of creation. "In the virgin womb of [his] imagination" the word is not, as in Stephen Dedalus' imagination, "made flesh."¹⁰ The Woman distracts him from the act of creation, and the level of the reservoir of whispers within himself rises, threatening to burst the dam he has constructed to hold them back. That the Woman acts in effect as an ally to the artist's inner Satanic element is clear from the ending of the story. Here, while "contemplating the face that she had overlaid with death," the Woman is "swept aside by a great storm of sound" (A, p. 271) as the whispers break their dam and take the form of an horrendous shriek, the artist's final utterance before dying. Deviance from his self-styled religion of art in favour of the Woman's heresy of love has proved fatal.

Though a short and in some respects trivial story, "Assumption" is of interest in that it demonstrates how Beckett tried to put into practice the theory of artistic originality he advances in "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce." There Beckett describes "Work in Progress" as being an original variation on Dante, Bruno and Vico; "Assumption," similarly, is intended to be a variation on A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and (to a lesser extent) on Women in Love, though it is in fact not as different from these earlier works as Beckett may have hoped. The structural circles of "Work in Progress" derive from Vico's circular theory of history, but that theory serves only as a formal convenience: Joyce neither expounds nor extols Viconian theory in his novel. By contrast, in his belief that the writer must put art before love, Beckett differs little from Stephen in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and he is at one with Lawrence in his view that love can be destructive. Unsurprisingly, he translates his theory of the relationship between art and the limits of knowledge into practice more satisfactorily in his subsequent writing than he does in this, his first short story.

2

Beckett started writing his first, as yet unpublished novel, "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," in May of 1932, just over a year after the appearance of his essay on Proust. He completed it in only a few weeks' time, and began sending the typescript to publishers, but was unable to find one who would accept it. By December he recognised that "Dream" would have to be substantially rewritten if it was ever to appear in print. Rather than rewrite it all, however,

Beckett decided to alter some parts of it for use in his next work of fiction, More Pricks Than Kicks, and other parts for inclusion in his first collection of poems, Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates.¹¹

Parts of "Dream" itself have been published in little magazines. Two fragments, "Text" and "Sedendo et Quiescendo," appeared before Beckett started writing the novel itself, and were later incorporated into it; a third fragment, "Jem Higgins' Love-Letter to the Alba," was published in 1965.¹² Beckett now refuses, however, to allow publication of the novel in full, for he considers it "'immature and unworthy.'"¹³ His biographer, Deirdre Bair, says that this comment is his way of dismissing "blatant, undisguised autobiography," and of wishing to avoid offending the lifelong friends who are viciously satirised in it.¹⁴

But although "Dream" is based largely on Beckett's own experience, it also owes something to earlier works of literature--in particular, to Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women, Tennyson's "A Dream of Fair Women," and Henry Williamson's The Dream of Fair Women: a Tale of Youth After the Great War.¹⁵ Beckett makes use of Chaucer, Tennyson and Williamson in much the same way as he argues Joyce made use of Dante, Bruno and Vico in "Work in Progress": they are structural and thematic points of departure for the writing of an original work. The fact, for example, that Beckett's epigraph to "Dream" is a variation on the opening lines of The Legend of Good Women has important implications for the novel as a whole. Chaucer's poem begins:

A thousand sythes have I herd men telle
That there is joye in hevene and peyne in helle,
And I acorde wel that it be so;
But natheles, this wot I wel also,
That there ne is non that dwelleth in this contre,

That eyther hath in helle or hevene ybe,
 Ne may of it non other weyes witen,
 But as he hath herd seyde or founde it writen;
 For by assay there may no man it preve.¹⁶

By contrast, Beckett's epigraph reads:

A thousand sythes have I herd men telle,
 That ther is joye in heven, and peyne in helle;
 But--

Geoffrey Chaucer. (D, p. [i])

By altering Chaucer's "And" to "But" in the third line, Beckett makes it clear that he is unwilling to accept as fact received doctrine about Heaven and Hell. Where, despite certain reservations, Chaucer is prepared to believe they both exist, the one as a reward for the morally good, and the other as a punishment for the wicked, Beckett, having no direct experience of the afterlife, is sceptical. In "Dream" he presents us with a world like that of "Work in Progress," a world characterised by the "absolute absence" (J, p. 33) of absolute values. Not only are the women in his novel just "fair to middling," in contrast to Chaucer's; in addition, his main character, Belacqua, takes his name from a figure in Dante who goes neither to Heaven nor Hell, but is obliged to spend a period equal to his lifetime at the entrance to Purgatory.¹⁷ In his essay on Joyce Beckett describes "Work in Progress" as being "purgatorial" in the sense that it portrays a world of relative values midway between the "unrelieved viciousness" of Hell and the "unrelieved immaculation" (J, p. 33) of Paradise. "Dream" is purgatorial in the same sense.

Nevertheless, Beckett's Belacqua yearns after spiritual ideals: he falls in love with a woman called the Smeraldina-Rima (outlandish names are a feature of "Dream") because she is "the living spit of Madonna Lucrezia del Fede" (D, p. 12),¹⁸ and he enters into a non-

physical relationship with another woman, the Alba, because he believes she might lead him, as Beatrice led Dante, to a state of spiritual bliss. Each woman is thus less a person in her own right than a projection of Belacqua's mind, and in this respect, each resembles Eve, the main female character in Henry Williamson's novel--Eve who exclaims to her admirer, William Maddison: "'Silly Billy, you don't know me at all. You're in love with a dream-woman, an Eve in moonlight . . . '"¹⁹ In other respects, however, the women characters in the two novels are quite dissimilar, as are the novels themselves. The structure, style, tone and approach to characterisation of Beckett's "Dream" are markedly different from Williamson's; and whereas Williamson is concerned to demonstrate the effect the Great War had on a whole generation, Beckett dwells in an abstract way on such topics as love, mysticism, art and the artist. He is largely indifferent to the influence that events in the larger world might have on his characters.

"Dream of Fair to Middling Women" resembles Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women" in structure, in that both present a disrupted, seemingly capricious dream-sequence of events. "The only unity in this story," comments Beckett at one point, "is . . . an involuntary unity" (D, p. 118). Beckett rejects the Naturalistic practice of explaining the behaviour of characters in terms of a chain of cause and effect. "The effect or concert of effects . . . shall not . . . be stated. Milieux, race, family, structure, temperament, past and present and consequent and antecedent back to the first combination and the papas and mammas and paramours and cicisbei and the morals of Nanny and the nursery wallpapers and the third and fourth generation snuffles. . . . That tires us. As though the gentle reader could be nothing but

an insurance broker or a professional punter" (D, p. 10). "Dream" also represents an implicit departure from Proust, for whereas A la recherche du temps perdu is (as Beckett argues in his essay) an adaptation of music to fiction, his own novel is not. "[It] is most devoutly to be hoped," says Beckett ironically near the start of "Dream,"

that some at least of our characters can be cast for parts in a liŭ-liū. For example, John might be the Yellow Bell and the Smeraldina-Rima the Young Liū and the Syra-Cusa the Stifled Bell and the Mandarin the Ancient Purification and Belacqua himself the Beneficent Fecundity or the Imperfect, and so on. Then it would only be a question of juggling like Confucius on cubes of jade and playing a tune. If all our characters were like that--liŭ-liū-minded--we could write a little book that would be purely melodic, think how nice that would be, linear, a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect, a one-fingered telephony that would be a pleasure to hear. (Which is more or less, if we may say so, what one gets from one's favourite novelist). (D, p. 8)

Here Beckett makes unexpected use of ancient Chinese musical terminology. The "Yellow Bell" is the name of the fundamental note in the Chinese twelve-tone scale; the other notes have names similar to the ones Beckett assigns his characters: "Greatest Tube," "Great Frame," "Pressed Bell," "Old Purified," "Mean Tube," "Luxuriant Vegetation," "Forest Bell," "Equalizing Rule," "Southern Tube," "Not Terminated," and "Answering Bell."²⁰ In the Chinese system, the term "'12 lŭ' refers to the theoretical system of 12 pitches within the octave whose frequencies . . . are related to each other at specific ratios. . . . When arranged in ascending order, the 12 lŭ form the equivalent of a Pythagorean chromatic scale."²¹ Like the Pythagoreans, the Chinese musical theorists of the first millenium B.C. believed that the order observable in the succession of notes in a scale was a reflection of the essential orderliness of the universe; their division of the 12 lŭ into two equal groups, male

and female (given above as "liǔ" and "liū," respectively), was an important aspect of their belief.²²

Beckett toys ironically with, but ultimately rejects the idea of assimilating his characters to musical notes in order to write an "orderly chain-chant solo of cause and effect"--a simple fictional score which suggests that the universe is (as it was for the Pythagoreans) harmonious and ultimately comprehensible as a whole.²³ Via "Dream's" bizarrely disrupted structure, he stresses, on the contrary, that the universe is inharmonious and far too complex to admit of exhaustive human understanding. His characters behave not as single notes, but as highly complicated human beings: they "do just what they please, they just please themselves. They flower out and around into every kind of illicit ultra and infra and supra We are afraid to call for the simplest chord" (D, p. 104). What is needed is a "tuning-fork charlatan to move among the notes and size 'em up and steady 'em down and chain 'em together in some kind of a nice little cantilena and then come along and consolidate the entire article with the ground-swell of its canto fermo" (D, p. 112).

But the role of "tuning-fork charlatan" is one that Beckett resolutely refuses to play. Though at times he behaves like a conventional omniscient narrator, he is careful to emphasise that he is neither "Deus enough nor ex machina enough" (D, p. 104) to understand and control his characters fully. In this he is conscious of differing from a writer like Balzac, for

To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his

creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put whenever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. . . . We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is wonderful, but why call a distillation of Euclid and Perrault Scenes from Life? Why human comedy? (D, pp. 106-07).

Human comedy, in Beckett's view, must be a study of human complexity: Balzac is unsatisfactory because he pretends to an omniscience and omnipotence no human being can possibly have, with the result that his characters behave more like puppets than real people. Beckett undermines his own ostensible omniscience and omnipotence in "Dream" by claiming that his main character is someone he has met in real life; the implication is that he knows him no better than any one human being knows another, and has only limited control over his behaviour.²⁴ In addition, Beckett refers to himself throughout the novel as "we," meaning by this a "con[s]ensus . . . of me" (D, p. 3). Thus he stresses in Schopenhauerian terms that as narrator he is an altogether human succession of willing subjects.

Belacqua's no less human attempts to make sense of his life form the main focus of the novel. Like Beckett, he believes that "[t]he reality of the individual . . . is an incoherent reality [that] must be expressed incoherently" (D, p. 91) in works of literature. At one point, he tells another character that he is planning to write a book--a book that will be (like "Dream") "ramshackle, tumbledown, a bone-shaker, held together with bits of twine, and at the same time as innocent of the slightest velleity of coming unstuck as Mr Wright's original flying-machine that could never be persuaded to leave the ground" (D, p. 124). The book is, however, never completed; significantly, the one example of Belacqua's art that comes to light in "Dream" is a poem that describes how his love for

the Smeraldina-Rima has dispelled his confusion about life's complexity. In contrast to his projected book, which is to be as unstructured as life itself, the poem is a conventional sonnet:

At last I find in my confused soul,
Dark with the dark flame of the cypresses,
The certitude that I cannot be whole,
Consummate, finally achieved, unless

I be consumed and fused in the white heat
Of her sad finite essence, so that none
Shall sever us who are at last complete
Eternally, irrevocably one,

One with the birdless, cloudless, colourless skies,
One with the bright purity of the fire
[O]f which we are and for which we must die
A rapturous strange death and be entire,

Like syzygetic stars, supernely bright,
Conjoined in One and in the Infinite! (D, p. 63)²⁵

In the octave Belacqua presents himself as an individual who believes that love can confer meaning on life. In the sestet he envisions entering into an essentially mystical relationship, involving both on his part and the Smeraldina's the metaphoric death of the self and coming into being of a spiritually conjoined other. Interestingly, the last two lines of the poem represent a variation on the kind of mystic union Birkin speaks of wanting to achieve with Ursula in Women in Love: "'What I want is a strange conjunction with you--' he said quietly; '--not meeting and mingling;--you are quite right:--but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings:--as the stars balance each other.'"²⁶

Unlike Birkin, however, Belacqua believes that the mystical conjunction of lovers can and should be achieved in the absence of sexual relations, and that it should be a complete fusion, so that the personal identity of each individual is lost in the larger whole.

Beckett mocks the relationship Belacqua has entered into with the Smeraldina when he pictures him sitting

at the end of the Carlyle Pier in the mizzle in love . . . with a slob of a girl called Smeraldina-Rima whom he had encountered one evening when as luck would have it he happened to be tired and her face more beautiful than stupid. His fatigue on that fatal occasion making him attentive to her face only, and that part of her shining as far as he could make out with an unheart[h]ly radiance, he had so far forgotten himself as to cast all over and moor in the calm curds of her bosom which he had rashly deduced from her features that left nothing but death to be desired as one that in default of Abraham's would do very nicely to be going on with in this frail world . . . (D, p. 2)

Belacqua's first encounter with the Smeraldina recalls Dante's first glimpse of Beatrice in La Vita Nuova. Belacqua is attracted not by her (the Smeraldina's) sexual charms so much as by the "unearthly radiance" of her face, which suggests that she might lead him, if not to Heaven, at least to a spiritual anticipation of Heaven on Earth. Beckett, however, casts scorn on Belacqua's yearning by insisting that the Smeraldina is in fact "a slob of a girl" with a "stupid" face upon which Belacqua is foolish to have projected his notions of spiritual love. In the remainder of the novel he mocks his character's belief that love can bring order and meaning to the chaos of our experience. More generally, Beckett wants to suggest that life is essentially chaotic, and will remain so in spite of our attempts to make sense of it.

Belacqua professes a willingness to deny himself the Smeraldina's sexual favours; but in a passage presenting his character's most secret feelings, Beckett reveals that Belacqua has not been altogether successful in bringing his sex drive under control. Belacqua, he says, is "A hedgecreeper! A peeping Tom in bicycle-clips, the ones that go round! Well then up he rose and

apprehended without passion round and about the Sabbath brushwood foothill couples" (D, p. 64). Though he has tried to deny his sexual impulses by maintaining a non-physical relationship with the Smeraldina, he has been unable to prevent himself from finding an alternative outlet in voyeurism.

Belacqua also finds an outlet in local brothels, though they tend to upset his ideas about the life of the spirit. He is troubled by the fact that he is unable to engage the services of a prostitute without mentally identifying her with the Smeraldina, who is thereby abolished as a Beatrice figure. "He hauled her . . . in spite of himself, into the brothel; and there . . . all the fine feathers came off. There, as one and as spirit, as spirit of his spirit, she was abolished" (D, pp. 36-37).²⁷ He is troubled, too, by the discovery that the sex act itself, performed with the prostitute so that he might be free to exclude the physical from his relationship with the Smeraldina, has the surprising effect of being spiritually beatific. "The carnal frivolity, broached in the first place in order that the real spirit might never be degraded to the rank of succubus, yielded the real spirit. That was an abominable confusion, ultimately a fragmentation of the realities of her and him, of the reality in which she and he were related" (D, p. 37). Here Belacqua's certainty that the mystical experience he describes in his sonnet can confer order on the chaos of life falls into disarray. By the time he reaches the point of breaking off with the Smeraldina, he has all but decided that the "real spirit" might just as well be provided by prostitutes as by a partner in a non-physical relationship. At a drunken New Year's Eve celebration, he tells her father, the Mandarin, about a prostitute in "the old town, . . .

[the] perfection of [whose] limbs . . . has been weighing me up to the peace of Jerusalem. I have the address of Abraham's bosom. . . . The true Shekinah . . . is Woman'" (D, p. 94). The true Shekinah--the true mystical revelation, in other words²⁸--can arise, he believes, from wholly carnal sex.

In spite of the assurance with which he announces this, Belacqua is by no means convinced that either sexual activity or sexual abstinence is necessarily the key to meaning and order. While still involved with the Smeraldina, Belacqua experiments with meditation, and finds that by withdrawing into his mind, into "a Limbo purged of desire" (D, p. 38), he is able to enter into "real thought and real living, . . . live cerebation" (D, p. 39). Meditation--the experience of his mind going "wombtomb" (D, p. 39)²⁹--is something Belacqua finds spiritually beatific. Yet he also finds that the mystical state arising from the most profound meditation cannot be deliberately invoked. He is simply not free (in Schopenhauerian terms) to will himself into a state of complete will-lessness; he cannot, Beckett says,

will and gain his enlargement from the gin-palace of willing. Convinced like a fool that it must be possible to induce at pleasure a state so desirable and necessary to himself he exhausted his ingenuity experimenting. He left no stone unturned. He trained his little brain to hold its breath, he made covenants of all kinds with his senses, he forced the lids of the little brain down against the flaring bric-à-brac, in every imaginable way he flogged on his coenaesthesia to enwomb him, to exclude the bric-à-brac and expunge his consciousness. . . . All for nothing. . . . How could the will be abolished in its own tension? (D, pp. 109-10)

In the interests of transcending his will, Belacqua's best course might be to devote himself, as mystics traditionally have, to a life of asceticism. But in a conversation with "Mr Beckett," Belacqua reveals that he is a "'dud mystic.'" He meant mystique

raté," Beckett comments, "but shrank always from the mot juste. . . . 'John' he said 'of the Crossroads, Mr Beckett. A borderman.' And to be sure he did at that moment suggest something of the ascetic about town. . . . 'Give me chastity' he mentioned 'and continence, only not yet'" (D, p. 166). This last statement is an echo of St. Augustine's Confessions, where the saint laments having failed to pray to God as a young man for the strength to remain chaste.³⁰ Entering earlier into an ascetic life would have enabled him to discover certain truths more quickly; but, says St. Augustine, addressing himself to God, "I was afraid that you would answer my prayer at once and cure me too soon of the disease of lust, which I wanted satisfied, not quelled."³¹

Since Belacqua is not a Christian, he is not interested in coming closer to the Christian God;³² his goal instead is to make either meditation or love the means of finding order and purpose in life. Disenchanted with the Smeraldina, he breaks with her and enters into a non-physical relationship with the Alba, an intelligent woman who has gathered about her a circle of Dublin artists and intellectuals. Beckett pictures her at one point

furled in her coils upon the settee, the small broad pale face spotted in a little light escaped from the throttled west. Her great eyes went as black as sloes, they went as big and black as El Greco painted, with a couple of good wet slaps from his laden brush, in the Burial of the Count of Orgaz the debauched eyes of his son or was it his mistress? (D, p. 155)

Here Beckett implies that, like the Woman in "Assumption," the Alba is a potential agent of destruction: her "coils upon the settee" suggest that she has a serpent-like capacity for evil, and her black, debauched eyes, that she is dissolute and unprincipled. By describing her elsewhere as being "white and still and Hermione all

of a sudden" (D, p. 176), he also suggests that she is like Hermione Crich in Women in Love. But whereas Birkin's affair with Hermione is one that ends quickly prior to his entering into a mystical relationship with Ursula, Belacqua's affair with the Alba is the last he has in the novel.

The Alba serves as an audience for Belacqua's theories about love and art, but not as a means to his discovering order and purpose in life. At first she is willing to tolerate him; later, however, she finds that he was "too irremissibly naive for her altogether When she would make up her mind finally that . . . he was inextricably Limbese, then that was where she stepped off" (D, p. 173). The point at which the Alba decides he is too "inextricably Limbese"--too self-absorbed and too devoted, in his curious way, to meditation--is never described in the novel, and the various hints that she has a potential for evil are never realised. In the final chapter of "Dream" she and Belacqua attend a party together where, drunk and badly behaved, he causes her to reflect that "she had seldom seen anybody looking more sovereignly ridiculous" (D, p. 208). The novel ends inconclusively, with Belacqua seeing her home and then returning homewards himself on foot in the rain.

The open ending of "Dream" is entirely appropriate to a novel that disclaims the existence of absolute values and that seeks to mirror the complexity and incoherence of the world at large. For Belacqua to discover in its closing pages some ultimate truth about the world or himself would be inconsistent with Beckett's purposes: it is significant that, having written the ending, Beckett went back to revise it in such a way as to remove the suggestion that Belacqua owes anything, ultimately, to the mercy of God.³³ In other respects,

however, "Dream" is, in Beckett's own words, "immature and unworthy." Much of the novel is written in a pretentious style, and its satire is generally clumsy. Often characters enter the action for a few pages, then are either dropped altogether or are seldom heard of again. While this is consistent with Beckett's wish to write a capriciously dream-like novel, "Dream's" third chapter in particular, with its elaborate descriptions of a variety of minor characters at the expense of Belacqua and the Alba, seems curiously and unnecessarily diffuse. It is not until we re-encounter part of "Three" in a different context, as "A Wet Night" in More Pricks Than Kicks, that we begin to see what Beckett is trying to achieve.

The main problem involved in writing a work of literature about the incoherence of modern life is to ensure that the work itself does not become incoherent. Belacqua's solution to the problem in the case of his poem to the Smeraldina is simply to adopt an established form--the sonnet; Beckett's solution, both in rewriting "Dream" as More Pricks Than Kicks and in writing subsequent novels and plays, is often to posit variations on established literary forms--as we have seen here and shall see in chapters to follow.

NOTES

¹"Assumption" was first published in transition, 16-17 (June 1929), 268-71; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by A. The story contains a number of minor typographical errors; I have corrected these silently rather than make repeated use of the distracting "sic." In Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 4, John Fletcher and Raymond Federman point out that "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" was published in the same number of transition, 242-53. "It seems fairly certain," they comment, "that the essay was issued in volume form [in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1929), (3)-22] before it appeared in [t]ransition"; in the absence of manuscript evidence, they are unable to say which was written first, "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce" or "Assumption."

²See James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), p. 218.

³In The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 16, Rubin Rabinovitz identifies the "buffoon in the loft" as a conductor, and comments that "The conductor and organist are metaphorical representations of psychological impulses: one demands an utterance; the other, capable of producing it, does not."

⁴This oft-quoted phrase is, of course, from Samuel Beckett's "Three Dialogues" with Georges Duthuit, first published in Transition Forty-Nine, 5 ([Dec.] 1949), 97-103, and reprinted in Samuel Beckett, Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder), 1983, pp. 138-45. The phrase appears in Disjecta, p. 139.

⁵D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love (1921; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), p. 88.

⁶Ibid., pp. 101 and 23.

⁷Ibid., p. 518. Lawrence's chief exponent of orthodoxy in Women in Love is the largely autobiographical Birkin, who speaks at one point to Ursula of the mystic union he wants to achieve with her: "'What I want is a strange conjunction with you--' he said quietly; '--not meeting and mingling;--you are quite right:--but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings:--as the stars balance each other'" (p. 164).

⁸The blue flower derives from Novalis's unfinished novel, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, published posthumously in 1802. It appears in the novel as a symbol of Heinrich's love for the character Mathilde; later it became in German literature a "widely recognised symbol of all Romantic longing." (Henry and Mary Garland, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," in The Oxford Companion to German Literature

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 366). Vega in the Lyre is the constellation Bloom and Stephen observe in the "Ithaca" section of Ulysses when they come together in a moment of spiritual communion (see James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 624). Beckett mentions Vega again in his unpublished novel, "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" (completed 1932), p. 63 and passim, where the Smeraldina is described as his "douce Vega."

⁹See, for example, St. John of the Cross's poem, "Stanzas of the Soul," in which union with God is described as follows: "Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!/ Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,/ There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze." (Quoted from The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1953), I, 326).

¹⁰A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, p. 217.

¹¹For further information about the composition of "Dream" see Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), pp. 145-46. Bair discusses the novel's relationship to More Pricks Than Kicks (London: Chatto & Windus, 1934) on pp. 160-62. Lawrence Harvey discusses "Dream's" relationship to Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates (Paris: Europa Press, 1935) in Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1970), pp. 254-71.

¹²"Text," New Review, 2 (April 1932), 57; "Sedendo et Quiescendo," Transition: an International Workshop for Orphic Creation, ed. Eugene Jolas (The Hague: Servire Press), 21 (March 1932), 13-20; "Jem Higgins' Love-Letter to the Alba," New Durham, n.v., n.d. [June 1965], [10-11].

¹³Bair, p. 146.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵John Fletcher was the first critic to draw attention to Beckett's debt to Chaucer, Tennyson and Williamson, in The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 16.

¹⁶Geoffrey Chaucer, The Legend of Good Women (Text G), in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 482.

¹⁷Purgatorio IV. 109-35.

¹⁸All quotations from "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" are from the typescript held at the Dartmouth College Library; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation D. For further information about the typescript, see Richard Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 101-02.

¹⁹Henry Williamson, The Dream of Fair Women: a Tale of Youth After the Great War (1922; rpt. London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 257.

²⁰For a discussion of the role of ancient Chinese music in "Dream" which reaches different conclusions from mine, see Jeri Kroll, "Dream of Fair to Middling Heroes: a Study of Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction," Diss. Columbia University, 1974, pp. 192-94. Kroll's source for the names of the notes listed above is John Hazedel Levis, Chinese Musical Art (New York: Paragon Books Rpt. Corp., 1963), p. 64.

²¹The New Grove Dictionary of Music, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), IV, 261.

²²Ibid.

²³See W.K. Guthrie, "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism," in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), VII.

²⁴On pp. 165-66 of "Dream," Beckett records a conversation held with Belacqua "in the course of a stroll in the Prater" (D, p. 165).

²⁵Harvey, p. 283, points out that the sonnet to the Smeraldina is a poem Beckett wrote to a girl he knew in Germany, whom Bair, p. 75, has identified as Peggy Sinclair. Harvey, p. 284, also mentions that the sonnet was published in "Sedendo et Quiescendo," p. 17 (see note 12). Apart from some minor changes in punctuation, only lines 12 and 13 differ from the unpublished version of the poem: "A strange exalted death and be entire,/ Like two merged stars, intolerably bright. . . ."

²⁶Women in Love, p. 164. See note 7 for the relevance of this passage to "Assumption."

²⁷Elsewhere, Belacqua tells another character: "'I admit Beatrice . . . and the brothel, Beatrice after the brothel or the brothel after Beatrice, but not Beatrice in the brothel, or rather, not Beatrice and me in bed in the brothel" (D, pp. 91-92).

²⁸The Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., Macmillan, 1970), XIV, 1330, identifies the Shekinah as "a revelation of the holy in the midst of the profane."

²⁹The term "wombtomb" appears to derive from the "Proteus" episode of Joyce's Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 53, where Stephen's lips "lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her womb. Oomb, allwombing tomb." When Belacqua "goes wombtomb" he enters into a meditative state in which the period of a lifetime--the period from womb to tomb--is mystically annihilated.

³⁰St. Augustine, Confessions, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), Book VIII, Chapter 7, p. 169.

³¹Ibid.

³²See D, p. 35, where Beckett speaks of Belacqua's "system of reference", and pp. 37 and 107, where Belacqua offers opinions or behaves in ways that he feels can be justified with reference to "his [in context, clearly not the Christian] God."

³³Admussen, p. 101, points out that the three pages appended to the end of "Dream," numbered 197-99, are an earlier variant version of the ending given on pp. 213-15. The most important difference between the endings lies in the final sentences. Where the earlier version reads: "It transpired in the end that what he had to do was to move on. It was the mercy of God that the pain was almost gone and he was able to" (D, appended p. 199), the later handwritten version has: "Scarcely had he made to employ [his hands] on his face when a voice, slightly more in sorrow than in anger this time, enjoined him to move on, which, the pain being so much better, he was only to[o] happy to do" (D, p. 215). Interestingly, it is the later ending that finds its way into More Pricks Than Kicks (1934; rpt. London: John Calder, 1970), p. 88.

CHAPTER THREE

MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS AS COMIC EPIC

By December, 1932 "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" had been rejected by so many publishers that Beckett decided to revise parts of it for publication in a different form. He began by rewriting the Smeraldina's letter to Belacqua in Chapter One as "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," then turned to a passage near the end of the novel, which he rewrote as "A Wet Night."¹ Beckett offered the two reworked episodes from "Dream" to Dublin Magazine, together with an entirely new story about Belacqua, entitled "Ding-Dong," but all three were rejected. When other literary magazines also turned the stories down, Beckett decided to write some further episodes in the life of Belacqua with a view to getting them published as a book. Between May and September of 1933, he wrote seven episodes, which he sent with the three mentioned above and a story that had been published in 1932, "Dante and the Lobster," to the London publisher, Chatto & Windus. Of the eleven in total, Chatto & Windus accepted ten for publication in book form as More Pricks Than Kicks; the eleventh, "Echo's Bones," was rejected, and remains unpublished to this day.²

Most critics regard More Pricks Than Kicks as a collection of short stories, though a few have remarked that the chronological arrangement of episodes suggests that it might be read as a novel.³ Chronology, however, is not the only clue to Beckett's intentions: as Rubin Rabinovitz has shown, the eleven episodes are unified by a

variety of narrative devices.⁴ Moreover, Beckett's many allusions to Dante, Fielding and Joyce, and his burlesque handling of certain epic conventions suggest that these devices are part of a larger, fully realised plan to fashion the episodes into a latter-day comic epic.

The term "comic epic" (or, more fully, "comic epic-poem in prose") originates, of course, with Fielding, who defines it in theoretical terms in his Preface to Joseph Andrews (1742), and translates his theory into practice not only in that novel, but in Tom Jones (1749) and Amelia (1751) as well.⁵ Fielding had a high regard for the classical epic, and felt that a comic prose work embodying certain epic and mock epic elements would both delight the readers of his day and also serve to instruct them by revealing a range of human faults through satire. In Tom Jones he stresses his high moral purpose: there is nothing in it, he says, that is "prejudicial to the cause of religion and virtue; nothing inconsistent with the strictest rules of decency, nor which can offend even the chastest eye in perusal. On the contrary, I declare, that to recommend goodness and innocence hath been my sincere endeavour in this history."⁶

Beckett does not share Fielding's belief that fiction should recommend "goodness" and "virtue" to readers: as in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," so also in More Pricks Than Kicks, the fictional world he creates is one characterised by the "absolute absence" (J, p. 33) of absolute values.⁷ Nevertheless, Beckett hints at a certain indebtedness to Fielding by way of scattered allusions to his work. Thus Belacqua is said to be "not a bad-looking young fellow, a kind of cretinous Tom Jones" (MPK, p. 111);⁸ another character, Ruby Tough, is presented at one point "in the posture of Philosopher

Square behind Molly Seagrim's arras" (MPK, p. 96); and, most important of all, a passage is included in "Ding-Dong" that is clearly based on the famous chapter in Joseph Andrews in which Joseph is robbed, left naked by the roadside, and eventually rescued by the occupants of a stagecoach.⁹ Where Chaucer, Tennyson and Henry Williamson serve Beckett in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" as points of departure for the writing of an original work of fiction, Fielding's comic epics serve this purpose in More Pricks Than Kicks. As we shall see, Beckett makes use of various Fieldingesque devices to give shape to his novel--the novel that began as the comparatively amorphous "Dream." Yet in contrast to Fielding's novels, More Pricks Than Kicks is a comic epic of relativism, focusing, like Beckett's other early fiction, on the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

Fielding's belief in the absolute value of Christian teaching on the subjects of "goodness" and "virtue" finds expression in his approach to characterisation. In Joseph Andrews, for example, he presents us with a moral exemplar in the figure of Parson Adams, a highly virtuous man who not only shows us how a good Christian ought to behave, but who provides a standard against which the other characters may be judged. Significantly, there is no comparable character in More Pricks Than Kicks, for Beckett takes care to avoid suggesting that his novel is intended to endorse established Christian values. Christian values derive their authority from the existence of God; but if God does not exist--and Beckett hints at various points in the novel that He may not--absolute distinctions between good and evil cannot be made with certainty.¹⁰ Accordingly,

Beckett's Belacqua, like Dante's, is (in traditional Christian terms) neither outstandingly virtuous nor outstandingly vicious.

Beckett's approach to characterisation differs from Fielding's in another respect as well. In his Preface to Joseph Andrews, Fielding emphasises that his characters are meant to be as much like real people as possible. He has copied them, he says, from "the book of nature," and has taken care not to present them as caricatures, for his aim in the novel is to exhibit his observations and experience of men rather than his ability to create unnatural "monsters."¹¹ Thus he emphasises that while the mock-epic element in Joseph Andrews is evident in its diction, it is "carefully excluded . . . from our . . . characters," who never suffer mock-epic distortion, but conform "strictly to nature."¹² By contrast, the characters in More Pricks Than Kicks are almost all deliberate caricatures, and the main character, Belacqua, is presented to us in mock-heroic terms. Beckett reverses Fielding's approach to characterisation in refusing to copy from "the book of nature" for the reasons given in "Proust" and "Dream of Fair to Middling Women." To copy nature is in his view to "transcribe the surface" (P, p. 79) of life and present the reader not with characters who are representative of man in all his complexity, but who are instead no better than "clockwork cabbages" (D, p. 106). Only a truly omniscient author--an author possessed of the omniscience of God--would be capable of creating characters who accurately portray both the outward appearance of men and women and also the hidden complexities of their inner lives. Aware that he is less than omniscient, Beckett makes comic grotesques of his characters for the

sake of emphasising that they should not be mistaken for living beings.¹³

A recent book by Marilyn French on Joyce's Ulysses indirectly suggests that Beckett drew not only on Fielding but also on Joyce and Dante in writing his comic epic of relativism. French argues that Ulysses invites the reader to take a journey in a series of concentric circles corresponding to Dante's circles of Hell. "These circles," she says, "are levels not of states of damnation or salvation, but of perception. Their gradation expresses increases in distance from humanity, and the varying distances are Joyce's equivalent to Dante's moral hierarchy. The world lies at the center; what changes is the distance from which we readers view it and the angle from which we view it. We, not the characters, occupy the various levels: they move only linearly. And for our tour of these ascending levels, Joyce provides a guide, a narrator. The narrator wears a variety of masks."¹⁴ Corresponding to the variety of masks is the variety of styles and narrative viewpoints in Ulysses, whose purpose is to present the reader with aspects of the truth about the world around him, while emphasising that there is no final truth.

In More Pricks Than Kicks, similarly, Beckett provides a narrator to guide the reader on a journey through the fictional world inhabited by Belacqua and his friends. As in Ulysses, the style and narrative viewpoint change from chapter to chapter as the narrator dons a succession of masks, and although we view the characters from a number of different angles and in a number of different lights, what we see of them does not lead to any absolute truths about man. Beckett's novel resembles Joyce's in these important respects; yet there are important differences, too, which ensure that More Pricks

Than Kicks is more than just an imitation of Ulysses. Where Ulysses, in French's words, "does its best to imitate infinity"¹⁵ by presenting as much material as possible about the Dublin of 1904, More Pricks Than Kicks is more limited in scope. Its eleven episodes¹⁶ focus on the activities of largely middle class characters, to the exclusion of the mass of ordinary people found in the eighteen episodes of Joyce's novel. And where Joyce takes pains to persuade us that his three main characters are real people, by presenting us with a wealth of interior and exterior information about them, Beckett makes a caricature of Belacqua by carefully restricting the information he makes available. As we circle around Belacqua, we observe him in his capacity as a student, a lover, a friend, a hospital patient, a corpse and, finally, as a spirit of the dead residing in a comic conflation of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. There is no suggestion in the novel, however, of an ascending progression. Beckett rejects the conical journey of Joyce's Ulysses (and of Dante's Mount of Purgatory) in favour of visits to varying levels of perception, finding the latter more appropriate to his comic epic of relativism.

More Pricks Than Kicks plunges us, as epics conventionally do, in medias res. Its opening chapter, "Dante and the Lobster," introduces Belacqua late one morning studying The Divine Comedy, and goes on to describe his involvement in a mock-epic battle and his mock-epic descent to the underworld. The battle takes place, comically, between Belacqua and the food he eats for lunch. First he burns two pieces of toast and takes them off the grill.

Next a thick paste of Savora, salt and Cayenne on each round, well worked in while the pores were still open with the heat. No butter, God forbid, just a good forment of mustard and salt

and pepper on each round. . . . This meal that he was at such pains to make ready, he would devour it with a sense of rapture and victory, it would be like smiting the sledged Polacks on the ice. He would snap at it with closed eyes, he would gnash it into a pulp, he would vanquish it utterly with his fangs. (MPK, p. 12)

The two slices of toast are not to be eaten on their own: Belacqua makes a special trip to the grocer to buy "a good green stenching rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese, alive" (MPK, p. 14) to place between them. That the toast has "pores," that the cheese is "alive," animates the enemy, but does nothing to diminish the ridiculousness of Belacqua's victory. It is clear from the outset that the main character of More Pricks Than Kicks is a mock-heroic figure: the scale of his triumphs and setbacks is to be relative to his stature.

Belacqua's descent to the underworld takes place near the end of the chapter, when he takes a fresh lobster home to his aunt. "She embraced him and together they went down into the bowels of the earth, into the kitchen in the basement" (MPK, p. 20). He is horrified to discover that the lobster is to be boiled alive,¹⁷ but comforts himself with the thought that "it's a quick death, God help us all." To this the narrator adds, chillingly, "It is not" (MPK, p. 21). The question of whether boiled lobsters die quickly gives rise to epistemological, and ultimately, to metaphysical uncertainty. How is it possible to know whether lobsters die quickly or slowly? While Belacqua can only hope that they experience a quick death, the narrator intrudes with ostensibly omniscient authority to emphasise that they do not.

Early in the chapter Beckett reminds us, however, that omniscient figures in literature know no more than the human authors

who create them. On the opening page, Belacqua reads a passage from The Divine Comedy in which Beatrice explains to Dante the origin of the spots on the moon.¹⁸ "She showed him in the first place where he was at fault, then she put up her own explanation. She had it from God, therefore he could rely on its being accurate in every particular" (MPK, p. 9). Beatrice's explanation is, of course, Dante the poet's, and while Dante was prepared to accept as absolute truth the medieval belief that the spots on the moon are "Cain with his truss of thorns" (MPK, p. 11), modern scientific advances have made it clear that the spots have another cause altogether. Beatrice's comments thus have the status of relative truth: they are true for the medieval, but not for the modern reader.

It is significant that Belacqua dwells on the idea that the spots are "Cain with his truss of thorns, dispossessed, cursed from the earth, fugitive and vagabond" (MPK, pp. 11-12), for this is Beckett's way of introducing the idea that if God does exist, He is either cruel to His creatures or blithely indifferent to their suffering. "The moon," Belacqua muses, "was [for Dante] that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast might not die quickly" (MPK, p. 12). Though He has foreknowledge of the fact that Cain will slay his brother Abel, the God of the Old Testament not only fails to prevent the murder, but (according to medieval belief) punishes Cain for it by exiling him to the moon.

In Dante's Inferno, similarly, Belacqua reads about the soothsayers who, as a punishment for their wickedness in wanting to see into the future, are obliged to spend an eternity with their heads turned around on their shoulders, weeping streams of tears down

their backs. Dante pities them, but is rebuked by Vergil on the grounds that foreknowledge is quite properly the exclusive province of God. "Here pity most doth show herself alive,"/ says Vergil, "When she is dead. What guilt exceedeth his,/ Who with Heaven's judgment in his passion strives?"¹⁹ Belacqua is intrigued by the fact that in the first line, "Qui vive la pietà quando è ben morta," "pietà" may be translated as either "pity" or "piety." "Why not piety and pity both," he asks himself, "even down below? Why not mercy and Godliness together?" (MPK, p. 20).

These questions have a bearing not only on the sufferings of the men and women in Dante and the Bible, but on present-day suffering as well. At various points in the chapter, the narrator alludes to the case of Henry McCabe, a man convicted of murder in Dublin in 1926. Contemporary accounts of his trial reveal that the evidence against him was by no means conclusive; nevertheless, he was found guilty, and was hanged on 9 December 1926, the day before the action of "Dante and the Lobster" takes place.²⁰ The question playing in the background of the chapter is how a merciful God could allow McCabe to die when it was uncertain that he was in fact a murderer. One possibility, of course, is that he died because God knew him to be guilty, and felt that his punishment was just. But then the question arises as to how God, foreknowing everything, could have permitted the murders to take place.

A committed Christian might answer that the victims, too, were wicked people who deserved to die;²¹ or that their deaths were part of God's inscrutable, but ultimately beneficent plan. Belacqua's reflections on Cain and the soothsayers, however, suggest two further possibilities: either God exists, and is cruel or indifferent to His

creatures; or He does not exist, in which case human suffering is simply a fortuitous, but inescapable part of life. The fact that the title of More Pricks Than Kicks is taken from Acts 9.5, where Saul on the road to Damascus is stricken down, and hears the voice of Christ say "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," does not mean that Beckett believes that the "pricks" of life are necessarily visited upon us by God. Through the title of his novel he does no more than suggest that the existence and malevolence of God are possibilities we should consider.

Beckett reminds us of these possibilities in the chapters that follow. In all but "Ding-Dong" and "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," his narrator plays the role of an omniscient analogue to God. While in some chapters he mocks Belacqua and in others is openly contemptuous of him, he is at all times hostile to Belacqua's search for the absolute in a world characterised by its absolute absence. In "Ding-Dong" Beckett reveals that the narrator's omniscience is spurious: here, for the only time in the novel, he (the narrator) stands before us as a one-time friend of Belacqua's, an ordinarily biased human being. But even in this chapter he remains a shadowy figure; Beckett is careful to ensure that the identity of our guide to his comic epic of relativism is never made absolutely clear.

Where "Dante and the Lobster" is set in Dublin, the action of the novel's second chapter takes place in Fingal, the ancient name for North County Dublin. As Mary Power has shown, the chapter's title, "Fingal," refers partly to the place and partly to the eponymous hero of James Macpherson's Fingal (1761), a long verse epic.²² Brave, strong, gallant and wise, Fingal is in every respect a conventional epic hero; Belacqua is in every respect his opposite.

Macpherson claimed to have translated Fingal's adventures from the work of a Gaelic bard named Ossian, but it is now known that he wrote much of the epic himself.²³ "Beckett," comments Power, ". . . adds another dimension to the mock-heroic. He is writing a parody of the hero of a serious but bogus epic."²⁴

While in both "Dante and the Lobster" and "Fingal" the narrator presents Belacqua as a mock-heroic figure, in the latter he is more clearly disapproving. When, for example, Winnie asks Belacqua to identify the hills far away to the north, the narrator plays the role of a satirically malevolent God in intruding both his own thoughts and Winnie's into the dialogue to emphasise how pretentious Belacqua is:

'The Naul' said Belacqua. 'Is it possible you didn't know the Naul?' This in the shocked tone of the travelled spinster: 'You don't say you were in Milan (to rime with villain) and never saw the Cena?' 'Can it be possible that you passed through Chambery and never called on Mme de Warens?' . . .

'Oh yes' he said, 'bons vins et Lamartine, a champaign land for the sad and serious, not a bloody little toy Kindergarten like Wicklow.'

You make great play with your short stay abroad, thought Winnie. (MPK, pp. 25-26)

Winnie and the other characters in the chapter are treated no more kindly than Belacqua. When it is Winnie's turn to comment on the landscape, the narrator asks rhetorically, "who shall silence [her], at last?" (MPK, p. 27). Similarly, he reveals that Dr. Sholto of the Portrane Lunatic Asylum harbours "madness and evil in his heart" (MPK, p. 34), and he callously describes the patients as a "herd" of "loonies" (MPK, p. 30).²⁵ Near the end of the chapter, after a series of minor problems, the three main characters--Belacqua, Winnie and Dr. Sholto--briefly come together in a combination satisfactory to all three. "Surely," comments the

narrator ironically, "it is in such little adjustments that the benevolence of the First Cause appears beyond dispute" (MPK, p. 33). But in the case of Winnie and Dr. Sholto, satisfaction soon gives way to distress; this, and the hostility of the narrator, which limits the value of any statement he makes, cast the existence and benevolence of the First Cause into doubt.

In "Fingal" Beckett presents Belacqua not only in a different light from in "Dante and the Lobster," but in a different role--as lover rather than student. Belacqua takes Winnie to the country "one fine Spring morning" (MPK, p. 25) in order to seduce her. When the narrator says that Belacqua felt a "sad animal" (MPK, p. 25) afterwards, he is partly recalling the age-old dictum that "after intercourse, every animal is sad,"²⁶ and partly hinting at an explanation for Belacqua's decision to desert Winnie later in the day. Near the start of the chapter, Belacqua tells her in pompous terms why he often visits Fingal:

'I often come to this hill' he said 'to have a view of Fingal, and each time I see it more as a back-land, a land of sanctuary, a land you don't have to dress up to, that you can walk on in a lounge suit, smoking a cigar.' What a geyser, she thought. 'And where much has been suffered in secret, especially by women.' (MPK, p. 27)

Here Belacqua is trying to communicate what Fingal means to him, and when Winnie fails to understand its special significance, he says that he wants "to be back in the caul, on my back in the dark for ever" (MPK, p. 31). In other words, Belacqua wants to withdraw from the world to be by himself. His desire to return to the womb should not be taken too literally, though, for subsequent events in the chapter suggest that he wants to spend his life meditating, his mind gone "wombtomb" (D, p. 110), as in "Dream." Relations with women

only make him unhappy: when Belacqua tells Winnie that his heart is in Portrane Lunatic Asylum, he means that the Asylum offers him the welcome prospect of withdrawing from the temptations--especially the sexual temptations--posed by the world, in order to devote himself to solipsism. Implicitly he believes that in the Asylum, through meditation, he will be able to attain to a spiritual absolute--the spiritual bliss Belacqua strives to experience in "Dream." Though the narrator offers no explanation for Belacqua's decision, near the end of the chapter, to abandon Winnie, steal a bicycle, and ride to the nearest pub, the fact that he is seen at the end of the chapter "in Taylor's public-house in Swords, drinking and laughing in a way that Mr Taylor did not like . . . " (MPK, p. 36), suggests that he is trying to get himself committed.

In "Love and Lethe," the next chapter in which Belacqua appears in the role of lover, the narrator assumes the guise of a Fieldingesque friend and guide to the reader. Fielding's narrator often interrupts the story line to offer helpful explanations of things that may not be entirely clear. "The reader may, perhaps, wonder at hearing nothing of Mr Jones in the last chapter," he comments in Book Five, Chapter Nine of Tom Jones. "In fact, his behaviour was so different from that of the persons there mentioned, that we chose not to confound his name with theirs."²⁷ Similarly, Beckett's narrator halts his description of an afternoon in the life of the Tough family, with Ruby Tough awaiting Belacqua's arrival, as follows: "We know something of Belacqua, but Ruby Tough is a stranger to these pages. Anxious that those who read this incredible adventure shall not pooh-pooh it as unintelligible we avail ourselves now of this lull, what time Belacqua is on his way, Mrs Tough broods

in the kitchen and Ruby dreams over her gloria, to enlarge a little on the latter lady" (MPK, pp. 92-93). And where Fielding's narrator often refers us to Hogarth drawings in describing characters, Beckett's tells us late in the chapter that Belacqua looked like "a super out of the Harlot's Progress" (MPK, p. 101).²⁸

Beckett's omniscient narrator is, like Fielding's, not always all-knowing. In Book I, Chapter 15 of Joseph Andrews, we are told that Joseph ate "either a rabbit or a fowl, I never could with any tolerable certainty discover which . . ."²⁹ Similarly, in "Love and Lethe" Beckett's narrator tells us that Belacqua has decided to commit suicide, adding: "How he had formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover. The simplest course . . . is to call that deed ex nihilo and have done. Which we beg leave to follow in the present instance" (MPK, p. 95).

Beckett employs a Fieldingesque narrator in "Love and Lethe" for the sake of presenting an episode which, like many of the episodes in Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones, has the potential for tragedy but ends comically, and which invites us to reflect on the existence and behaviour of God. Though the narrator protests his ignorance of Belacqua's reasons for wanting to enter into a suicide pact with Ruby Tough, these are apparently related to the fact that he is no better able to cope with the demands made upon him by women than he was in "Fingal". Ruby is drawn to suicide partly because she, too, has had an unhappy time with the opposite sex. What she has yearned for is the mystical conjunction of stars Belacqua describes in "Dream";³⁰ this, however, has been denied her.

The stage is thus set for a tragic double suicide. Ruby and Belacqua set off in his car, equipped with a revolver, some poison

and a bottle of whiskey. The whiskey is the chapter's mock-heroic counterpart to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness: drinking it helps them to forget that this is the day they are to kill themselves. But as they consume it, their resolve weakens, and they are both deeply shocked when the revolver suddenly goes off in Ruby's hands.

Characteristically, the narrator refuses to endorse Belacqua's comment that it was the "finger of God" that preserved him and Ruby from harm. "We state the facts. We do not presume to determine their significance," the narrator emphasises (MPK, p. 104).

Nevertheless, he adds the Fieldingesque comment that:

When the first shock of surprise had passed and the silence spent its fury a great turmoil of life-blood sprang up in the breasts of our two young felons, so that they came together in inevitable nuptial. With the utmost reverence at our command, moving away on tiptoe from where they lie in the ling, we mention this in a low voice. . . . [A]t least on this occasion, if never before or since, [Belacqua] achieved what he set out to do; car, in the words of one competent to sing of the matter, *l'Amour et la Mort--caesura--n'est qu'une mesme chose*. (MPK, p. 105)³¹

Though he may have set out to commit suicide and failed, Belacqua has still, the genial narrator assures us, achieved the metaphorical "little death" of sexual union.

When the omniscient narrator of "Walking Out," the next chapter concerned with Belacqua as lover, comments that Belacqua "was . . . a kind of cretinous Tom Jones" (MPK, p. 111), Beckett is clearly reminding us that his novel is a latter-day comic epic. Yet the hostility of the term "cretinous" suggests that, unlike the narrator of "Love and Lethe," the narrator of "Walking Out" is not a genial Fieldingesque satirist: here, as in "Fingal," he plays the role of a satirically malevolent God.³² Fielding's narrator is sometimes dismayed at the behaviour of his main characters--Joseph Andrews and

Tom Jones, for example—but is never quite as sardonic in attitude as the narrator of this chapter. Belacqua's fight with the Tanzherr in its closing pages puts us in mind of many similar fights in Joseph Andrews; however, Joseph is never guilty of spying on other couples when they make love, and the narrator's account of what happens when he is discovered is clearly harsher in tone than any in Fielding's novel: "Now a fierce struggle ensued. Belacqua, fighting like a woman, kicking, clawing, tearing and biting, put up a gallant resistance. But his strength was as little as his speed and he was soon obliged to cry mercy. . . . So much for his youth and vigour" (MPK, p. 120).

The narrator's attitude to Belacqua's fiancée is, by contrast, admiring. "In face and figure Lucy was entrancing, her entire person quite perfect. For example, she was as dark as jet and of a paleness that never altered, and her thick short hair went back like a pennon from her fanlight forehead. But it would be [a] waste of time to itemise her" (MPK, p. 113). The narrator's unwillingness to "itemise" Lucy suggests that he is impatient with writing description, just as he is also impatient with Belacqua's insistence on entering once again into a non-physical relationship as a means to spiritual bliss. His impatience with Belacqua arises from knowing that his sexual self-denial is less than complete. Though Belacqua wants Lucy to take a lover—a "cicisbeo" (MPK, p. 110)—after they are married, so that he himself can remain chaste, the narrator reveals that, as in "Dream," Belacqua has found an alternative sexual outlet in voyeurism.

"Walking Out" takes place on "one of those Spring evenings when," says the narrator, "it is a matter of some difficulty to keep

God out of one's meditations" (MPK, p. 109). It is a beautiful evening, and the landscape is at its finest. When Lucy is run down by a car and crippled for life, the question arises as to how God can allow the beauty of His creation to be marred by human suffering. As in earlier chapters there is no answer, though the omniscient narrator's hostility to Belacqua and sympathy for Lucy suggest that if there is a God, He is, like the narrator, a mere observer of events, capable of emotion but powerless to intervene and prevent pain. The Fieldingesque narrator of "Love and Lethe" ends that chapter with the wish that Ruby and Belacqua might enjoy themselves sexually. "May their night be full of music," he says (MPK, p. 105), "music" being in this context--as later, in Murphy--a synonym for sexual harmony. In contrast, the narrator of "Walking Out" ends this chapter with the news that Belacqua and Lucy marry, but have a celibate relationship, she being crippled. "They sit up to all hours playing the gramophone, An die Musik is a great favourite with them both, he finds in her big eyes better worlds than this, they never allude to the old days when she had hopes of a place in the sun" (MPK, p. 121). The contrast is a stark one.

In the novel's seventh chapter, "What a Misfortune," we learn that Lucy has died some two years after her accident. Belacqua, the omniscient narrator comments, "wore none of the proper appearances of grief," having only a "small stock of pity" (MPK, p. 125) at his command. Similarly, the narrator has (as in "Walking Out") only limited sympathy for the characters.

At the beginning of the chapter the narrator reveals that the new love of Belacqua's life, Thelma, is destined to inherit a substantial amount of money from her father.

To deny that Belacqua was alive to this circumstance would be to present him as an even greater imbecile than he was when it came to seeing the obvious; whereas to suggest that it was implied, however slightly, in his brusque obsession with the beneficiary to be, would constitute such obloquy as we do not much care to deal in. Let us therefore put forth a minimum of charity and observe in a casual way . . . that he happened to conceive one of his Olympian fancies for a fairly young person with expectations. (MPK, p. 127; my italics)

Belacqua's relationship with Thelma is "Olympian" in the sense of being out of the ordinary. He confides to her that on their honeymoon he would like to visit the Church of Saint Nicolas in Galway in order to kneel with her and invoke "the spirits of Crusoe and Columbus, who had knelt there before him" (MPK, p. 136).³³ In context it is clear that he looks on marriage as a metaphoric voyage of discovery; he hopes that with Thelma, he will make his way to uncharted islands, even continents, of spiritual bliss. Thelma is to be a Beatrice figure who will lead him ultimately to a private equivalent to union with God.³⁴

Belacqua is sexually attracted to Thelma, but would prefer to deny it: he wants to be married, yet he also wants to be a celibate mystic. The omniscient narrator mocks his aspirations when he says that the wedding ceremony itself communicates to Belacqua the kind of "mystical radiance that Joseph Smith would have found touching" (MPK, p. 149). Smith acquired the tablets of Mormon Law in what he claimed was an experience of divine revelation, but which critics have held was merely the product of an overactive imagination.³⁵ What the narrator is suggesting is that, in a world devoid of spiritual absolutes, Belacqua's mystical experience is spurious.

How Belacqua intends to maintain a celibate marriage is never explicitly stated. Though Thelma admires him on spiritual and intellectual grounds--on the strength of his being a poet--there is

no clear indication in the chapter that she shares his desire for a life from which sex is excluded. It is not until the final page that Belacqua hints at what she might expect of their honeymoon and subsequent life together:

'Do you ever hear tell of a babylan?' he said.
 Now Thelma was a brave girl.
 'A what did you say?' she said.
 Belacqua went to the trouble of spelling the strange word.
 'Never' she said. 'What is it? Something to eat?'
 'Oh' he said 'you're thinking of a baba.'
 'Well then' she said.
 His eyes were parched, he closed them and saw, clearer than ever before, the mule, up to its knees in mire, and astride its back a beaver, flogging it with a wooden sword. (MPK, p. 160)

As Jeri Kroll has observed, the term "babylan" derives from a letter Stendhal wrote to Prosper Merimée concerning his novel Armance.³⁶ Stendhal uses the term to describe his character Octave, who, though impotent, marries a woman named Armance for the sake of being able to live with her in a secure, respectable relationship. Kroll also recalls the medieval belief that in order to avoid capture, the beaver would bite off its own testicles.³⁷ By implication it is clear that in order to preserve a celibate relationship with Thelma, Belacqua proposes to deny--with nothing less than animal cunning--that he is capable of sexual intercourse. Like the mule, which is sterile, Thelma may not expect to have children: instead, she is to be enmired in a barren relationship and, further, is to be psychologically belaboured by Belacqua's insistence on his inability to make love to her. "What a Misfortune," the title of the chapter, proclaims that marriage is a misfortune for Thelma; the fact that we are told three chapters later that she "perished of sunset and honeymoon that time in Connemara" (MPK, p. 189) suggests that she died of a surfeit of romance, in combination with a mortifying lack

of sex. It is also a misfortune for Belacqua, whose dream of achieving spiritual bliss with Thelma is denied. As Jeri Kroll has pointed out, the chapter's title derives from Candide, in which Voltaire argues at length against the proposition that ours is the best of all possible worlds.³⁸ Voltaire itemises numerous instances of human suffering, and has one of his characters, Martin, suggest that God has handed over the world to a maleficent being.³⁹ In "What a Misfortune" the omniscient narrator's severely limited sympathy for the misfortunes of the characters invites us to ask ourselves what kind of being (if any) governs the present day world. It is characteristic of Beckett's comic epic of relativism that it does not provide us with a definitive answer.

The final chapter concerned with Belacqua as lover, "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," is taken over almost verbatim from a passage in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women."⁴⁰ In "Dream" the Smeraldina is for Belacqua a Beatrice figure, a woman who seems to offer the prospect of conduct to a state of spiritual bliss. Yet, as in More Pricks Than Kicks, she is in fact a woman of voracious sexual appetite. "Oh! Bel I love you terrible," she writes, "I want you terrible, I want your body your soft white body Nagelnacht! My body needs you so terrible, my hands and lips and breasts and everything els on me . . ." (MPK, p. 163). The Smeraldina's letter puts us in mind of Honour Blackmore's phonetically-spelled letter to Tom in Tom Jones and of Martha's letter to Leopold Bloom in Ulysses.⁴¹ In both Fielding and Joyce, however, we are made privy to the male character's reaction to the letter he receives; here we have only a hint of how Belacqua feels about the Smeraldina's protestations of love when she mentions that a letter has just arrived from him in

which she detects a note of coolness. "Bel! Bel! Bel!" she writes, "your letter has just come! Even if you cease to be all and allways mine!!! Oh! God how could you ever say such a thing, for lord sake dont!!!" (MPK, p. 166). Yet we also learn, a few pages later, that Belacqua has written a "'thing'" (MPK, p. 168)--presumably a poem--about her beauty. Whether Belacqua loves her in an idealised way, or is now ready to put aside his insistence on celibacy and accept her on her own terms is not clear. Two chapters later we are told that after Thelma's death, the Smeraldina seemed to Belacqua "the only sail in sight" (MPK, p. 189); but although they marry, we are not told what kind of relationship they have.

"The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" is of interest in artistic terms because it suddenly presents Belacqua not from the point of view of a hostile omniscient narrator, but from the standpoint of a woman who loves him. In no other chapter is he presented so sympathetically as in this one; however, the fact that the Smeraldina writes so oddly and protests her love so vehemently makes it impossible for us to take the letter seriously. It is impossible for us to imagine that Belacqua could achieve the spiritual experience of heaven on earth with this woman, for the Smeraldina is a ludicrously unsatisfactory Beatrice.

In the novel's other first-person chapter, "Ding-Dong," the narrator of More Pricks Than Kicks drops his mask of omniscience and reveals that at one time he and Belacqua were friends. "We were Pylades and Orestes for a period, flattened down to something very genteel; but the relation abode and was highly confidential while it lasted" (MPK, p. 40). We learn so little about the narrator in "Ding-Dong" that it is not clear why he compares himself to Pylades,

except to suggest that he and Belacqua were once very close. Belacqua, however, has confided to the narrator that he pictures himself as an Orestes figure, relentlessly pursued by the Furies. Accordingly, despite being "by nature sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence, asking nothing better than to stay put . . ." (MPK, p. 39), Belacqua spends much of his time in motion, trying to elude them. In the narrator's view, his one-time friend is not a hero like Orestes, but a fool.

Beckett's use of a hostile first-person narrator in "Ding-Dong" derives from Joyce's Ulysses. There, in the "Cyclops" episode, a nameless first-person narrator takes a metaphorically one-eyed view of Bloom, presenting him in as unflattering a light as possible. Set in a Dublin bar, the episode includes a passage in which some drunken, belligerent characters accuse Bloom of a variety of misdeeds. ". . . [They] were at it dingdong," the narrator tells us, "John Wyse saying it was Bloom gave the idea for Sinn Fein to Griffith to put in his paper all kinds of jerrymandering, packed juries and swindling the taxes off of the Government and appointing consuls all over the world to walk about selling Irish industries" (*italics mine*).⁴² Evidently the "Cyclops" episode influenced not only Beckett's choice of title, for late in the chapter, we find Belacqua similarly "at it dingdong" (to quote from Ulysses), arguing with a ticket-seller in a bar.

"Ding-Dong" focuses on the events of a particular evening during "the last phase of [Belacqua's] solipsism, before he toed the line and began to relish the world" (MPK, p. 39). As part of his continuing attempt to "give . . . the Furies the slip" (MPK, p. 39),

Belacqua sets himself in motion that evening along Dublin's Pearse Street. He has not gone far, when, says the narrator,

a little girl was run down . . . She had been to the Hibernian Dairies for milk and bread and then she had plunged out into the roadway, she was in such a childish fever to get back in record time with her treasure to the tenement in Mark Street where she lived. The good milk was all over the road and the loaf, which had sustained no injury, was sitting up against the kerb, for all the world as though a pair of hands had taken it up and set it down there. The queue standing for the Palace Cinema was torn between conflicting desires: to keep their places and to see the excitement. . . . Only one girl, debauched in appearance and swathed in a black blanket, fell out near the sting of the queue and secured the loaf. With the loaf under her blanket she sidled unchallenged down Mark Street and turned into Mark Lane. When she got back to the queue her place had been taken of course. But her sally had not cost her more than a couple of yards. (MPK, p. 43)

This passage is a variation on the well-known chapter in Joseph Andrews in which Joseph is robbed and left naked by the roadside, but is eventually rescued by a passing stagecoach. All but one of the occupants of the stagecoach puts forward selfish reasons as to why Joseph should not be helped; "and it is more than probable," comments Fielding, "[that] poor Joseph . . . must have perished, unless the postilion (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost) had voluntarily stript off a greatcoat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by the passengers), 'That he would rather ride in his shirt all his life than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition.'"⁴³ But whereas in Fielding the poorest character is the most charitable, the same is not true in the passage quoted above. Here no one comes to the aid of the stricken child, including the girl "debauched in appearance," who uses the accident as a means of securing a free loaf of bread. The fact that the girl comes from near "the sting of the queue" suggests that the people waiting

outside the cinema are scorpion-like; the further fact that the loaf is seen sitting up against the kerb, "for all the world as though a pair of hands had taken it up and set it down there" (MPK, p. 43) suggests that the bread, but not the child, has been preserved by the hands of a thoroughly arbitrary God. Whether God exists and is benignly disposed to man is impossible to prove absolutely: here Beckett suggests that when it is raised as a question in fiction, the answer is relative to the teller and the tale.

Belacqua sees what has happened to the little girl, but turns away from her, just as earlier in the chapter he had turned and walked in the opposite direction to a blind paralytic. He leaves the girl in the street and turns into a low pub, where he is approached by a woman he at first assumes is a prostitute. In fact she is selling theatre tickets--cheap seats in the gods, which she refers to as "[s]eats in heaven" (MPK, p. 47). Though Belacqua initially refuses to buy any, he eventually changes his mind, not because he feels sorry for the woman (she is clearly down on her luck), but because he wishes to bring to an end the scene she has begun to make. What the narrator wants to emphasise in "Ding-Dong" is that in "the last phase of his solipsism" (MPK, p. 39), Belacqua is too wrapped up in himself to take any interest in human suffering. In this he resembles the cruel and arbitrary God whose existence the narrator hints at when the child is run down--the God who from another "seat in heaven" observes the vast panorama of human distress without trying to relieve it.

The chapter that follows "Ding-Dong," "A Wet Night," derives from a passage near the end of "Dream of Fair to Middling Women." In "Dream" the passage concerned is curiously inconsistent with the rest

of the novel, for it dwells in detail on a series of minor characters and pays scant attention to Belacqua. It is only when we see it again in revised form in Beckett's comic epic of relativism, and realise that its narrative technique derives from the "Wandering Rocks" episode of Ulysses, that its artistic purposes become clear.

"Wandering Rocks" is presented from the point of view of an omniscient narrator who, taking a broad view of Dublin, describes various scenes of life there. Bloom plays only a small part in the chapter, and by the time we have reached the end of it, we realise that we have been called upon to compare him with the minor characters we have observed. Ultimately we find ourselves in agreement with Lenehan, who at one point suggests that Bloom is superior to the rest: "He's a cultured allroundman, Bloom is, he said seriously. He's not one of your common or garden . . . you know . . . There's a touch of the artist about old Bloom."⁴⁴ In contrast, "A Wet Night" leaves us in a state of uncertainty about Belacqua: the narrator demonstrates that in some respects he is better than the other characters in the chapter, but that in other respects he is worse. Interestingly, this chapter and the other taken from "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," have nothing to do with the question of God's existence and behaviour to man. Beckett leaves that question in abeyance in "A Wet Night" in order to emphasise that Belacqua, now seen in the role not of student, lover or friend, but of social being, is neither a "cultured allroundman" like Bloom nor a moral exemplar like Parson Adams.

The chapter consists of nine informal scenes, which range as widely as the scenes in "Wandering Rocks" do, but which nevertheless are concerned with a smaller number of people--those invited to a

party being given by Caleken Frica. The narrator refers to the party guests as the "faithful" (MPK, p. 70), the name given by Proust to Mme Verdurin's snobbish coterie, and it is clear that the Frica is modelled on Mme Verdurin herself. The "faithful" are characterised by their affected dialogue and their undiscerning interest in art. One of their number--a character known only as "the homespun poet"--is planning to recite at the party a hopelessly insipid poem he has written, "Calvary by Night," and will, the narrator implies, find favour with all. Belacqua himself is a poet, as we discover in another chapter of More Pricks Than Kicks; however, in "A Wet Night" his "Hypothalamion" (MPK, p. 134) is not offered for comparison with "Calvary by Night" or any other poem. Significantly, the narrator prefers not to suggest here that there is (as Lenehan says of Bloom) "a touch of the artist" about Belacqua. That suggestion would undermine his point that Belacqua is less pretentious than the other partygoers.

The pretentiousness of the guests forms a stark contrast to Belacqua's behaviour as he makes his way to the party in the chapter's eighth scene. To fortify himself against the ordeal to come, he has been drinking heavily; stopped by a Civic Guard as he staggers towards the Frica's house, he vomits on the man's shoes. Finally he arrives, soaking wet, and is ushered in to meet "the Dublin that mattered" (MPK, p. 82); to the disgust of the Alba, the current object of his affections, he begins to weep. He makes no effort to disguise his contempt for the evening's entertainment, protesting, for example, that the homespun poet, who follows an inept singer, is "'Vinegar . . . on nitre'" (MPK, p. 84). Belacqua is to some extent a sympathetic figure--to the extent, at least, that his

outrageously boorish behaviour serves to debunk the pretensions of those assembled. But the fact that it is boorish tips the scales against him: we cannot say of him, as Lenehan does of Bloom, that he is a "cultured allroundman." In "A Wet Night" it is the Alba who guides our response to Belacqua when she reflects to herself that "she had never seen anybody, man or woman, look quite such a sovereign booby" (MPK, p. 82).

When in the final scene, the narrator comments that, after the party, the rain "fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity" (MPK, p. 87), we recognise that Beckett is parodying the famous ending of Joyce's story, "The Dead," and that the Frica's party may be viewed as a parodic variation on the party Joyce's main character, Gabriel Conroy, attends.⁴⁵ But Belacqua is not a Gabriel Conroy, for, apart from anything else, he lacks the generosity and sympathy for others that well up in Joyce's character at the end of the story. Despite the narrator's insistence in "Ding-Dong" that that chapter presents "the last phase of [Belacqua's] solipsism" (MPK, p. 39), "A Wet Night" reveals that self-absorption and an inability to cope with the social demands of the world still figure importantly in his life.

In "Yellow" the narrator focuses on Belacqua not as a socialite, friend or lover, but as a hospital patient. The chapter begins on the morning of his operation:

Belacqua waked feeling greatly refreshed and eager to wrestle with this new day. He had underlined, as quite a callow boy, a phrase in Hardy's *Tess*, won by dint of cogging in the Synod: When grief ceases to be speculative, sleep sees her opportunity. He had manipulated that sentence for many years now, emending its terms, . . . even calling upon it to bear the

strain of certain applications for which he feared it had not been intended, and still it held good through it all. (MPK, p. 171)⁴⁶

As in earlier chapters, the omniscient narrator takes a hostile attitude to Belacqua, presenting him in the above passage as a devious cheat. Later he says of the novel's main character that he is "an indolent bourgeois poltroon" (MPK, p. 174) and a "dirty low-down Low Church Protestant high-brow" (MPK, p. 184) with a "grocer's sense of honour" (MPK, p. 174). The narrator is particularly scathing about Belacqua's fear that the operation may turn out badly, and confides to us, with the authority of omniscient foreknowledge, that "there is a good time coming for him later on, when the doctors have given him a new lease of apathy" (MPK, p. 174).

Throughout the chapter, Beckett's narrator assures us that God is on Belacqua's side. Belacqua is anxious not only about the operation but about the possibility that he might disgrace himself by being cowardly when the hospital staff come to take him for it. At one point, however, "the good God [comes] to his assistance with a phrase from the paradox of Donne: Now among our wise men, I doubt not but many would be found, who would laugh at Heraclitus weeping, none of which would weep at Democritus laughing" (MPK, p. 175). Later, "an angel of the Lord" (MPK, p. 184) puts him in mind of a funny story--the story of a parson who is invited to take part in an amateur dramatic production in which he is to be shot. The parson objects to saying the line, "'By God! I'm shot!'", and asks if he might substitute something milder. However, on the night of the performance, the revolver is mistakenly loaded with real ammunition, and when it goes off, the parson cries: "'BY CHRIST! I AM SHOT!'"

(MPK, p. 184). The Donne paradox and the story furnish Belacqua with the resolve to "arm his mind with laughter" (MPK, p. 177), and he enters the operating theatre bravely, only to die on the table. "By Christ!" exclaims the narrator in surprise, "he did die! They had clean forgotten to auscultate him!" (MPK, p. 186).

Clearly the narrator was in no position earlier to assure us that "a good time" lay ahead of Belacqua: his claim to omniscient foreknowledge was spurious. This raises the possibility, by implication, that if there is a God, He is ignorant of the future, and is either powerless or unwilling to intervene when His creatures suffer or die. However, other possibilities are implied in the chapter as well. At one point, the narrator comments that God is usually good, "if we only know how to take Him" (MPK, p. 172): in other words, what seems like divine cruelty--Belacqua's death, for example--may be part of God's inscrutable but ultimately beneficent plan. Alternatively, God may not exist at all, in which case Belacqua's death is purely an accident. Or--and this possibility is suggested by the reference to Hardy's Tess in the chapter's opening paragraph--it may be that God exists and delights in tormenting His creatures. When Tess is finally hanged, Hardy comments that "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with [her]."⁴⁷ As in previous chapters, Beckett refuses to endorse any of these possibilities; support for any one to the exclusion of the others would be inappropriate to his comic epic of relativism.

"Draff," the novel's last published chapter, is concerned with the aftermath of Belacqua's death. Once again the omniscient narrator adopts an attitude of hostility not only to Belacqua, but to

the Smeraldina and the other characters who mourn him. "Bodies don't matter," says the narrator, casting naturalistic convention to the winds, "but [the Smeraldina's] went something like this: big enormous breasts, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, popputa, mammosse, slobbery-blubberty, bububbububub, the real button-busting Weib, ripe. . . . The ears of course were shells, the eyes shafts of reseda . . . into an oreless mind" (MPK, pp. 189-90). From this description the Smeraldina emerges as a mindless body, an irredeemably comic grotesque. She is "so naturally happy-go-lucky that she did not find it at all easy to feel deeply, or rather, perhaps better, be deeply sentimental" (MPK, p. 198). Thus we are not surprised when, shortly after the funeral, the Smeraldina puts all thought of Belacqua behind her and enters into a liaison with Capper Quin, Belacqua's best man at his wedding to Thelma. Capper, or Hairy as he is also called, finds the death of his friend a liberation. Not only does he feel free to make advances to the widow, but he "seemed to have taken on a new lease of life. He spoke well, with commendable assurance; he looked better, less obese cretin and spado than ever before; and he felt better, which was a great thing" (MPK, p. 200). In "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," Beckett makes mention of "swine's draff" (D, p. 40), the remains of malt after brewing that farmers feed to swine. "Draff," the title of the chapter, suggests that the swinish characters who survive Belacqua feed metaphorically on his remains.⁴⁸ Capper in particular thrives on them.

Belacqua's death provides his gardener with food for thought, but it is food that poisons rather than nourishes. A morose man at the best of times, he shuts himself in the toolshed, where he becomes

"a clod of gloom" (MPK, p. 199). When the Smeraldina returns from the funeral, she finds that he has raped the servant girl and set the house on fire. As Jeri Kroll has shown, the gardener's behaviour is similar to that alleged of Henry McCabe, the man whose impending execution is mentioned in "Dante and the Lobster."⁴⁹ McCabe was said to have murdered all four members of the family he worked for as gardener, to have set fire to their house, and to have sexually assaulted the maid. It is significant that the last published chapter of More Pricks Than Kicks refers us back to the first, and that two other chapters are mentioned in "Draff" by title: "What a Misfortune" (MPK, p. 198) and "Yellow" (MPK, p. 201). Here Beckett is reminding us not only that the narrator of "Draff" has omniscient knowledge of the past, but that More Pricks Than Kicks has a single narrator who has adopted a succession of masks in presenting this comic epic of relativism.

Beckett's insistence on relativism is maintained to the end. As omniscient narrator of "Draff," he enters the mind of a groundsman at the cemetery where Belacqua is buried, and ends the published part of the novel with this passage:

The groundsman stood deep in thought. . . . The words of the rose to the rose floated up in his mind: 'No gardener has died, comma, within rosaceous memory.' He sang a little song, he drank his bottle of stout, he dashed away a tear, he made himself comfortable.

So it goes in the world. (MPK, p. 204)

Rubin Rabinovitz has pointed out that the groundsman's thoughts about roses derive from Diderot's Le rêve de D'Alembert, where the short life of roses is contrasted with the human life span.⁵⁰ If no gardener has died within rosaceous memory, it is because no rose outlives its gardener. Thus the gardener, from the roses' point of

view, seems immortal, just as God seems immortal to man. But whereas the roses have direct experience of the gardener who tends them, man has no direct experience of God, whose existence is therefore not a matter of knowledge, but of belief. In his novel's closing sentences, quoted above, Beckett asks us to consider two possibilities: either God has never existed; or He existed at one time, but unbeknownst to man, has either died or abandoned His creation. ("Ten to one," comments the narrator in "Draff," "God was in his heaven" (MPK, p. 199)). As in earlier chapters, where other possibilities are raised, Beckett refuses to endorse any one of them.

"Belacqua," comments the narrator midway through "Draff," "had often looked forward to meeting the girls, Lucy especially, hallowed and transfigured beyond the veil. What a hope! Death had already cured him of that naïvete" (MPK, p. 195). "Echo's Bones," the chapter of More Pricks Than Kicks that Chatto & Windus declined to publish, takes up this comment and describes in detail what Belacqua does experience after death. Initially he finds himself sitting on a fence, supplied with a pocketful of his favourite cigars; a sense of having reached the fence through "grey shoals of angels" (EB, p. 2) is still indistinctly with him. Yet it is far from clear that Belacqua has gone to Heaven. His recollection of a phrase uttered by Dante's Belacqua suggests that he may be either in Antepurgatory or Purgatory itself,⁵¹ while the sudden appearance of a curious procession of characters, some from earlier chapters of the novel, makes it seem that he is in Hell. In the procession are

The faithful, seeded with demons, a dim rabble, cringing home after Vespers . . . In the van an Editor, of a Monthly masquerading as a Quarterly; . . . next, a friend's wife, splendid specimen of exophthalmic goitre, storming along, her nipples up her nose; . . . next, Hairy, leaning back, moving

very stiff and open; next, in a covered baby Austen [sic], the Count of Parabimbi and his lady; . . . next, Caleken Frica, stark staring naked, jotting notes for period dialogue with a cauter dipped in cocoa . . . (EB, p. 5)

While this procession reminds us of scenes from such works as Dante's Inferno and Byron's "Vision of Judgment," it is curious for the fact that it pictures demons returning home from Vespers in the company of characters who appear in earlier chapters of More Pricks Than Kicks. The sense we have in this passage, and in "Echo's Bones" more generally, is that the afterlife in which Belacqua finds himself is a deliberate conflation of Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and the world as it is portrayed earlier in the novel. Rather than commit himself to belief in received doctrine, Beckett creates an eclectic afterworld in which to further the purposes of his comic epic of relativism.

The chapter comprises three episodes. In the first, a woman named Zaborovna Privet appears suddenly from a hedge, introduces herself, and offers Belacqua her services as a prostitute. Belacqua is willing, but his flesh is temporarily weak: real, not feigned impotence, as in "What a Misfortune," prevents him at first from accepting her offer. However, the afterworld Beckett describes is one of dream-like mutability, and when Zaborovna turns suddenly into a Gorgon, putting us in mind of the "quasi-Gorgonesque" (MPK, p. 189) Smeraldina, Belacqua unexpectedly recovers his sexual powers. On Earth, sex leaves him "a very sad animal indeed" (MPK, p. 25); here it becomes an "atonement for the wet impudence of an earthly state" (EB, p. 7).

The first episode ends abruptly, and Belacqua finds himself back on the fence. Struck from behind by a golf ball, he turns around to see who is responsible, and meets for the first time a character

named Lord Gall of Wormwood. Lord Gall is a giant of a man, outlandishly dressed in an "amaranth caoutchouc cap-à-pie [and] a cloak of gutta percha" (EB, p. 7), who insists on taking Belacqua home and confiding an intimate secret to him. The secret is that Lord Gall is sterile and desperately wants a son and heir. Where in Ulysses Bloom shows Stephen a picture of Molly, and hints that he would like him to become her lover, Lord Gall demands that Belacqua bed his wife Moll so that he might have a son. Against his will, Belacqua is now made the *cicisbeo* he asks Lucy to take in "Walking Out": the fact that Moll turns out to be "the most filthy little bromide of a half-baked puella that you could possibly imagine" (EB, p. 19) suggests that he is doing penance for his earlier unkindness to Lucy. Ultimately Moll gives birth to a child; unfortunately for Lord Gall, it is a girl. "So it goes in the world," says the omniscient narrator (EB, p. 19a), the implication being that, like the afterworld described in "Echo's Bones," the world we know is one in which desire and its satisfaction are often at odds.

The second episode ends as abruptly as the first, returning Belacqua to his place on the fence and then to a seated position on top of his own headstone. The groundsman mentioned at the end of "Draff," whose name turns out to be Mick Doyle, appears and strikes up a conversation with him. The two have a bet that nothing of Belacqua subsists in the grave below the headstone, and after some frantic digging, open the coffin and find that it contains only a handful of stones.⁵² In the meantime, the Alba has been waiting in a submarine offshore from the cemetery, and has been beckoning Belacqua to join her and the other souls sailing on it. Where it is bound is not clear, though there is an obscure sense of urgency about taking

him on board. Finally, tired of waiting for Belacqua, she departs without him, and the cemetery becomes "a cockpit of comic panic, Doyle stalking and rushing the tombstones, squatting behind them in ambush, behaving in a way quite foreign to his nature. So it goes in the world" (EB, p. 28).

The chapter ends on an inconclusive note, leaving us to puzzle over the significance of the submarine (is it a place of sanctuary, a ship of fools, or something else altogether?), and to puzzle, too, over Doyle's uncharacteristic behaviour. "So it goes in the world": in this context, the narrator is suggesting that, as in the world of "Echo's Bones," so in our world, uncertainty prevails. Beckett's comic epic of relativism ends in a thoroughly appropriate way.

More Pricks Than Kicks represents a significant artistic advance on "Dream of Fair to Middling Women." Beckett's comic epic of relativism is more formally sophisticated than the earlier novel, and shows that in the mid-1930s, Beckett was beginning to develop a more refined approach to embodying in fiction his views on the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge. While his efforts in "Dream" to mirror the complexity and incoherence of the world at large result to a large extent in artistic incoherence, in More Pricks Than Kicks we have a carefully worked-out demonstration that our world is characterised by the absolute absence of absolute values. Using Fielding as his starting point enabled Beckett to write a comic epic for our time--a comic epic that, although also influenced by Joyce and other writers, is nevertheless an original work. More Pricks Than Kicks is not entirely without fault: like "Dream," its style is often pretentious and its satire clumsy. Yet it is a novel that promises greatness--such greatness as

is to be found in the five major novels to follow: Murphy, Watt,
Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable.

NOTES

¹The Smeraldina's letter appears in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," pp. 49-54; "A Wet Night" derives from a passage beginning on p. 178 of "Dream" and extending to the end of the novel.

²Beckett's reworking of "Dream" into More Pricks Than Kicks is described in detail by Deirdre Bair in Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), pp. 160-62 and p. 172. "Dante and the Lobster" first appeared in This Quarter, 5 (Dec. 1932), 222-36. Bibliographical information about the unpublished "Echo's Bones" is contained in Richard Admussen's The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 103-04.

³Bair, p. 164, says that More Pricks Than Kicks may be read as a "picaresque novel"; Eric Levy, in Beckett and the Voice of Species: a Study of the Prose Fiction (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980), p. 12, that the work may be "called a novel"; and Rubin Rabinovitz, in The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 36, that it is "more like an episodic novel" than a collection of short stories.

⁴See The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction, pp. 37-39.

⁵For a useful discussion of Fielding and the comic epic, see Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 249-70. On p. 259 Watt comments that "[m]any previous writers, . . . notably of the seventeenth-century French romances, had assumed that any imitation of human life in narrative form ought to be assimilated as far as possible to the rules that had been laid down for the epic by Aristotle and his innumerable interpreters; and Fielding--apparently quite independently--started from the same point of view." Having done a degree in Modern Languages at Trinity College, Dublin, Beckett would surely have been aware of this.

⁶Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (1749; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 37.

⁷Whether Fielding regards "goodness" and "virtue" as absolute values is debatable, for there are many occasions in his work where he condemns conventional Christian virtue in favour of generosity of heart. Beckett appears not to take this into account in his use of Fielding as a point of departure for the writing of More Pricks Than Kicks.

⁸All quotations from More Pricks Than Kicks are from the Calder & Boyars edition (London, 1970); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by MPK.

⁹The passage in question is in MPK, p. 43, and is based on Book I, Chapter 12 of Joseph Andrews (1742; rpt. in Joseph Andrews and

Shamela, ed. Martin C. Battestin (London: Methuen, 1961)), pp. 41-47.

¹⁰Thus, while to the nonbeliever, the Ten Commandments might seem a worthy body of moral prescriptions, they would not have the same absolute value for him as for someone who firmly believes that God revealed the Commandments to Moses.

¹¹Joseph Andrews, pp. 12 and 9.

¹²Ibid., p. 8.

¹³In The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction, p. 24, Rubin Rabinovitz makes the same point about the characters in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women."

¹⁴Marilyn French, The Book as World: James Joyce's Ulysses (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1976), p. 4.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶I intend to treat the unpublished "Echo's Bones" as part of the novel, despite its having been rejected by Chatto & Windus. All quotations are from a copy lent to me by the Dartmouth College Library; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by EB.

¹⁷One of Beckett's sources for this chapter appears to be the "Lestrygonians" episode of Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), where Bloom reflects that "Lobsters [are] boiled alive" (p. 175), and where he orders a Gorgonzola cheese sandwich for lunch (p. 172).

¹⁸Paradiso II.48 ff., in Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, ed. C.H. Grandagent, rev. Charles Singleton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1972).

¹⁹Inferno XX.28-30. I am quoting here from H.F. Cary's translation of The Divine Comedy (London: James Finch, 1844).

²⁰See Jeri Kroll, "The Surd as Inadmissible Evidence: the Case of Attorney General v. Henry McCabe," Journal of Beckett Studies, 2 (Summer 1977), 47-58.

²¹Kroll, p. 50, notes that the victims were known for their odd behaviour. "Intimations of family jealousies and of sexual assault crept into the trial but were never overtly discussed."

²²Mary Power, "Samuel Beckett's 'Fingal' and the Irish Tradition," Journal of Modern Literature, 9 (1981-82), 151-56.

²³See English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford U.P., 1956), p. 67.

²⁴Power, 151.

²⁵Power, 155, suggests that Dr. Sholto is named after John Sholto Douglas, Eighth Marquess of Queensberry, who had "periodic bouts of madness."

²⁶For a discussion of possible sources for the phrase "omne animal post coitum triste est," see Rabinovitz, p. 52, n4.

²⁷Tom Jones, p. 234.

²⁸In Tom Jones, p. 91, for example, Fielding says that Mrs. Partridge "exactly resembled the young woman who is pouring out her mistress's tea in the third picture of the Harlot's Progress."

²⁹Joseph Andrews, p. 56.

³⁰Ruby's "itch for syzygy" (MPK, p. 93) recalls the last two lines of Belacqua's sonnet to the Smeraldina (D, p. 63), where he pictures the Smeraldina and himself as being "[l]ike syzygetic stars, supernly bright/ Conjoined in One and in the Infinite!"

³¹Cf. the end of Joseph Andrews (p. 297), where Joseph and Fanny make love for the first time: "[We] shall leave this happy couple," says the narrator, "to enjoy the private rewards of their constancy . . ." Harvey, p. 285, reveals that the line "Car l'Amour et la Mort n'est qu'une mesme chose," is from Ronsard's final poem (LXXVII) of Le Second livre des sonnets pour Hélène (Oeuvres complètes, ed. Laumonier, I, 340-41).

³²The narrator of "Love and Lethe" is never quite so hostile towards Belacqua, though he does draw attention to Belacqua's "big pallid gob" (MPK, p. 96) at one point, and refers to him elsewhere as a "pup" (MPK, p. 98).

³³In "Belacqua as Artist and Lover: 'What a Misfortune,'" Journal of Beckett Studies, 3 (Summer 1978), 25-26, Jeri Kroll notes that "according to a long-standing Galway tradition, [Columbus] . . . knelt in the [Church of St. Nicolas in Galway] before embarking in the Santa Maria on his voyage to discover a northwest passage to the Indies and the Orient. . . . Galway was often the jumping-off point for trips to the east, and [Robinson Crusoe's] adventures were inspired by the account of an actual sailor, Alexander Selkirk."

³⁴Beckett gives us no reason to suppose, either here or elsewhere in More Pricks Than Kicks, that Belacqua subscribes to conventional Christian belief. Instead, he implies that Belacqua has developed a private religion of solipsism.

³⁵See Richard Bartlett, The New Country: a Social History of the American Frontier, 1776-1890 (London: Oxford U.P., 1974), p. 381.

³⁶Kroll, "Belacqua as Artist and Lover . . .," 28.

³⁷Ibid., 30-31.

³⁸Ibid., 32. In Candide, Chapter XI, an Italian eunuch says at the sight of an attractive young woman who has been raped: "'O che sciagura d'essere senza c[oglioni]'"--Oh, what a misfortune to be without testicles (F.M.A. de Voltaire, Candide (1759), in Romans et contes (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 169).

³⁹Candide, p. 197.

⁴⁰D, pp. 49-54.

⁴¹See Tom Jones, p. 732; Ulysses, p. 79.

⁴²James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 334.

⁴³Joseph Andrews, p. 44.

⁴⁴Ulysses, p. 234.

⁴⁵Ruby Cohn makes this point in Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 33.

⁴⁶See Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 266, for the passage in question, which reads: "When sorrow ceases to be speculative sleep sees her opportunity."

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 446.

⁴⁸See Kroll, "The Surd as Inadmissible Evidence . . .," 55, for a slightly different explanation of the title "Draff."

⁴⁹Ibid., 49-50 and 56-57.

⁵⁰Rabinovitz, p. 54, n26.

⁵¹In EB, p. 10, Belacqua reflects to himself, "Sedendo et quiescendo, yes, who said that?" John Fletcher comments in The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 16, that "sedendo et quiescendo anima efficitur prudens is an Aristotelian dictum said to have been quoted by Belacqua . . . when Dante reproached him with his idleness: 'it is by sitting and resting that the soul grows wise . . .'"

⁵²Harvey, p. 68, notes that the title of "Echo's Bones" is taken from Ovid's Metamorphoses, where spurned by Narcissus, Echo

. . . frets and pines, becomes all gaunt and haggard,
Her body dries and shrivels till voice only
And bones remain, and then she is voice only
For the bones are turned to stone.

(Ovid's Metamorphoses, trans. Rolf Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1955), p. 69 (Book III, ll. 395 ff.). Rabinovitz, p. 60, suggests that Belacqua resembles both Echo and Narcissus in differing

respects, but that by the end of the chapter, "he is more like Echo than like Narcissus, so parched and shriveled that he is little more than a voice and some stones."

CHAPTER FOUR

MURPHY'S METAPHYSICS

1

In the autumn of 1934, while living in the London district of World's End, Beckett began work on a story about a young down-at-heel intellectual also living in World's End; gradually the story evolved into the novel Murphy.¹ By the spring of 1936 Beckett felt that he had reached the point where he could submit it for publication; however, there was little interest at this time in novels lacking either a social or political theme, and Murphy was turned down by no fewer than forty-two publishing houses before finally being accepted by Routledge in December of 1937. It came out in March of the following year.²

While writing Murphy, Beckett sought to support himself by way of literary journalism, but in the years between his arrival in London and the publication of his novel, he managed to publish only ten short reviews.³ This is not, of course, surprising, given that he was preoccupied with the writing of a highly complex novel. Nor is it surprising that the reviews reveal more about Beckett's attitude to art and the artist than they do about the books he was meant to be discussing. Significantly, the ideas he develops in theoretical terms about the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge in these occasional pieces find their way into his

practice as a writer of fiction both in Murphy and in the novels that followed.

Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer, so evident in his 1931 essay on Proust, manifests itself once again in the reviews. As Nicholas Zurbrugg has observed, Beckett emphasises in four of them his preference for "a radiant mystical art revealing the 'essence' of reality," and scorns the "logical, realistic art of line and surface" produced by the popular writers of the day.⁴ Beckett's Schopenhauerian sympathies are, however, more evident in three reviews Zurbrugg considers only in passing: "Recent Irish Poetry," "Denis Devlin," and "Les Deux Besoins."

In "Denis Devlin," as in "Les Deux Besoins," Beckett distinguishes between two kinds of need:

On the one hand the . . . need to need, . . . the art that condenses as inverted spiral of need, that condenses in intensity and brightness from the mere need of the angels to that of the seraphi[m]s, whose end is its own end in the end and the source of need. . . . And on the other the go-getters, the gerrymandlers, Davus and the morbid dread of sphinxes, solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle, the great crossword public on all its planes. . . . (DD, pp. 91-92)⁵

In context it is clear that the distinction Beckett is making in this passage is related to Schopenhauer's concept of metaphysical need. Schopenhauer holds that there resides in man a profound need to answer metaphysical questions--questions arising from our sense of wonder about the nature of the world. In intelligent individuals, the need to answer such questions is strong; however, "[the] lower a man stands in an intellectual regard the less of a problem is existence . . . for him; everything, how it is, and that it is, appears to him rather a matter of course" (WWI, II, 360).

Thus Beckett is distinguishing between, on the one hand, the artist, whose need to need answers to metaphysical questions--however tentative these answers may be--is evident in his art; and on the other, the general public, who find simple, soluble problems preferable to metaphysical speculation. Where the public has a "morbid dread" of what Schopenhauer refers to as "the riddle of the world" (WWI, II, 392), the artist devotes himself to raising questions he is unable to answer definitively. "Art," says Beckett, "has always been this--pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric . . ." (DD, p. 91).

There can be no definitive answers to metaphysical questions because of the "gulf" that exists between the artist and the "inaccessible other" (DD, p. 92).⁶ Here Beckett is echoing Schopenhauer's comment that the three forms of perception--space, time and causality--create a "deep gulf between the ideal and the real" (WWI, II, 400), an "irreducible boundary between object and subject" (WWI, I, 155). In every act of perception our minds treat the available sense data as effect and try to explain the cause by organising the data within a spatio-temporal framework. The result, "idea," is "the consciousness of a picture . . . [But clearly] the relation between such a picture and something entirely different from the [individual] in whose brain it exists can only be a very indirect one. This is perhaps the simplest and most comprehensible way of disclosing the deep gulf between the ideal and the real" (WWI, II, 400). In other words, our image of the world is only an image: perception provides us with at best a simplified, at worst a distorted view of the world as it really is. "Therefore," says Schopenhauer, "the actual, positive solution of the riddle of the

world must be something that human intellect is absolutely incapable of grasping and thinking; so that if a being of a higher kind were to come and take all pains to impart it to us, we would be absolutely incapable of understanding anything of his expositions" (WWI, II, 392).

In "Recent Irish Poetry," Beckett distinguishes between those contemporary poets who are aware that perception has inherent limitations and those who are not:

The [poet] who is aware of this may state the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects; he may state it as no-man's-land, Hellespont or vacuum, according as he happens to be feeling resentful, nostalgic or merely depressed. A picture by Mr. Jack Yeats, Mr. Eliot's 'Waste Land,' are notable statements of this kind. . . . Those who are not aware of the rupture, or in whom the velleity of becoming so was suppressed as a nuisance at its inception . . . are the antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods. (RIP, p. 70)⁷

What Beckett objects to in the "antiquarians"--the poets of the Celtic Twilight--is their embodiment of the "cut-and-dried sanctity" of "accredited themes" in their poetry. Of greater interest to him is the poetry of metaphysical uncertainty. It is in answer to a "deeper need" (RIP, p. 73) that contemporary poets like Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey have written poems which make no attempt to evade the "bankrupt relationship" (RIP, p. 75) between subject and object. Another poet of interest is Thomas McGreevy, who makes it clear in his writing that "it is the act and not the object of perception that matters. . . . Mr. [Mc]Greevy is an existentialist in verse, the Titchener of the modern lyric" (RIP, p. 74). He is an existentialist in the sense that his perceptions are as far as possible uncoloured by preconception (which is why the act of perception is more important to him than the object); he is "the Titchener of the

modern lyric" in that, like the experimental psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener, he values introspection more highly than perception.⁸

The fact that Beckett commends McGreevy's interest in introspection is significant, for in this essay, he seems inclined to agree with Schopenhauer that examination of the inner world of the mind is more profitable to the artist than protracted study of the world at large.⁹ Beckett also aligns himself here with Proust (albeit implicitly), Proust having believed that timeless truths about the world could be extracted from the inner sensations of involuntary memory. In Murphy, as in the novels and plays that follow, Beckett maintains his interest in Proust and Schopenhauer, and displays an increasing interest in experimental psychology. On the other hand, he draws sharply into question in these works the idea that introspection is any better than perception as a means to discovering timeless truths. As Murphy and the works that come after it demonstrate, definitive answers to metaphysical questions are, and always will be, beyond human reach.

2

By convention, the omniscient author knows everything about the characters he creates, and is in this sense an analogue to God. Normally the author does not suggest that his omniscience extends beyond the world of his novel; but in Murphy, Beckett gives us to understand that he knows everything about the world at large. "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new," Murphy begins. "Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free . . ." (Mu, p. 5).¹⁰

The tone is comic, the material philosophical: in the novel's opening sentences, Beckett comments boldly and authoritatively on the question of freedom.

But although Beckett possesses ostensible God-like omniscience, in places he ostentatiously limits the amount of information he is prepared to disclose to the reader. An important example is his description of Murphy's mind in chapter six, where he stresses that he is presenting us not with Murphy's mind "as it really was . . . but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be" (Mu, p. 76). Though omniscient--though capable of picturing Murphy's mind accurately and objectively--Beckett prefers to describe his character's obviously subjective image of it. His immediate purpose is to suggest that Murphy's image of his mind is a distortion of the reality. Yet he has also a larger purpose--hitherto unrecognised by critics--in describing Murphy's mind in this way. His larger purpose is to demonstrate satirically that it is impossible to draw absolutely certain conclusions about metaphysical issues.

This becomes clear when we examine chapter six in detail. Here it is revealed that, in forming his image of his mind, Murphy has drawn heavily on his knowledge of traditional metaphysics. The influence of Leibniz, Geulincx and Schopenhauer is especially important; being ostensibly omniscient, Beckett knows their works infinitely better than Murphy does, and is able to turn them against him satirically.

Leibniz is the source of Murphy's belief that his mind is a hollow sphere containing in microcosm the entire universe as it is, was and is to be.¹¹ "Nothing," Murphy believes, "ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside [his mind] but was already

present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it" (Mu, p. 76). Whether Murphy's mind is really a microcosm is something Beckett never reveals. But in the course of the novel he makes satiric capital of Murphy's interest in Leibniz by stressing that Murphy's image of his mind mirrors the world inadequately.

Murphy differs from Leibniz in distinguishing between the actual and virtual of his mind "not as between form and the formless yearning for form, but as between that of which he had both mental and physical experience and that of which he had mental experience only" (Mu, p. 76). But he agrees with Leibniz that "[imagination] imitates, in its own province and in the little world [of the mind], . . . what God [did] in the great world."¹² The three zones of his mind, Murphy believes, are zones of imagination, in which he can create images based on his "actual" and "virtual" experiences with the complete autonomy of God.

Murphy's first zone is a zone of light, in which he subjects to imaginary reprisal people of whom he has had "actual," unpleasant experience. "Here the chandlers were available for slow depilation, Miss Carridge for rape by Ticklepenny, and so on" (Mu, pp. 78-79). His second zone, in contrast, is one of half-light, in which he imagines himself in worlds of which he has only "virtual" (Mu, p. 76) experience: in zone two he pictures himself in Antepurgatory, for example, occupying the position of Belacqua, Dante's archetype of sloth. Zone three, finally, is in darkness: it consists of virtual rising into actual and actual falling into virtual in "a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms" (Mu, p. 79) reminiscent of St. Augustine's Chaos.¹³ Transposing himself in imagination into

this last zone, Murphy has the sensation not of being free, but of being caught up in the actual/virtual flux as a "mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (Mu, p. 79).

To demonstrate that Murphy is mistaken in thinking his image of his mind is an accurate image of the world at large, and more generally, that there are no definitive answers to metaphysical questions, Beckett creates in Murphy a fictional world embodying important counterparts to the three zones. Murphy's third zone is for satiric purposes the most important, and has two counterparts in the novel. The first of these is the "big blooming buzzing confusion" Neary speaks of in his farewell speech to Murphy:

Their farewell was memorable. Neary came out of one of his dead sleeps and said:
 "Murphy, all life is figure and ground."
 "But a wandering to find home," said Murphy.
 "The face," said Neary, "or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion. I think of Miss Dwyer." (Mu, p. 7)

Neary's contribution to this odd exchange is based on the work of two famous psychologists, Edgar Rubin and William James. In The Principles of Psychology, James describes the welter of sense-data with which we are daily assailed as a "great blooming, buzzing confusion,"¹⁴ while Rubin holds that we make sense of sense-data by distinguishing perceptually between "the figure, the substantial appearance of objects, and the ground, the . . . environment in which the [objects are] placed."¹⁵ What Neary is saying is that all our knowledge derives from sense-data, ordered according to figure-ground principles. His comments are comic because it is clear that the only figures of interest to him are female; yet the above passage has a larger significance to the novel as a whole.

Experiments performed by some of Rubin's contemporaries show that the figure-ground distinction is invariably a simplification of what is perceived. "[Experienced] perceptual wholes," they found, "tend toward the greatest regularity, simplicity, and clarity possible under the given conditions."¹⁶ The world as we know it through perception is merely an approximation (because a series of approximations of sense-data in different situations) of the world as it really is. But because our perceptual faculties are the only tools we have for making sense of the world around us, we will never be able to gain more than a partial idea of its true nature. Derived from perception, the "actual" and "virtual" experiences of Murphy's mind necessarily mirror the world inadequately.

Beckett makes use of Schopenhauer, another of the philosophers Murphy has studied, to extend his satiric attack. Schopenhauer holds that our senses furnish knowledge "only of relations between individual phenomena and by no means knowledge of the essential nature of things and the universal totality."¹⁷ Perception is limited by human self-centredness: according to Schopenhauer, the individual's every experience of sense-data is coloured by his predilections and prejudices.¹⁸ Whatever conclusions we reach about metaphysical issues like the mind's relationship to the world at large or the question of freedom are therefore nothing more than self-centred simplifications: this Beckett stresses satirically in reference to Murphy and the other characters.

As an ironic comment on the characters' tendency to simplify, Beckett's account of what happens in Murphy is itself a deliberate simplification. Ostensibly Murphy relates what happened to a group of "real" people who lived in London, Cork and Dublin between

February and October, 1935. Having assumed God-like omniscience, Beckett knows everything these people "did" in the period concerned; yet his narrative is a selection of events. In itself this is not remarkable: every author who tells a story about "real" people must decide what is relevant, and what irrelevant, to his purposes. But in Murphy Beckett lays special emphasis on the idea that a selection of events has been made, by suggesting that the novel consists of a number of "filmed" and "edited" scenes. Murphy abounds in self-conscious flash-backs, close-ups and long-shots; at one point, Ticklepenny appears "as though thrown on the silent screen by Griffith in midshot soft-focus" (Mu, p. 132).¹⁹ The fact that three speeches are described as "expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced" (Mu, pp. 12, 37, 84) conveys that the characters concerned have had their lines dubbed in, in a compressed and stylistically improved form, by Beckett in the role of "film-editor."

Like Beckett's description of the events in Murphy, his descriptions of the characters are self-conscious simplifications. Little more is said of Miss Carridge, for example, than that she has an offensive body odour; of Miss Dew, than that her thighs are misshapen; or of Murphy than that his clothing is ridiculously outmoded. Beckett pointedly withholds other information about the characters as a means of satirising their simplified metaphysical opinions, his satire being a counterpart to Murphy's activities in the first zone of his mind. In zone one--the zone of his "actual" experiences--Murphy takes God-like revenge in imagination on the people he knows and dislikes. Similarly, in return for their self-centred tendency to simplify, Beckett vengefully transforms Murphy's "real" people into comic caricatures, while ensuring that the story

of their activities is set against the largely undistorted background of London, Cork and Dublin.

Beckett emphasises that the background is realistic by specifying place names so meticulously as to make it possible for us to follow the characters' peregrinations on street-maps of the three cities.²⁰ Yet it is clear from a passage in chapter two that his careful attention to detail is a means of implicating the reader in his satire:

[Celia] entered the saloon bar of a Chef and Brewer and had a sandwich of prawn and tomato and a dock glass of white port off the zinc. She then made her way rapidly on foot, followed by four football pool collectors at four shillings in the pound commission, to the apartment in Tyburnia of her paternal grandfather, Mr. Willoughby Kelly. (Mu, pp. 11-12)

Some of the details in this passage are acceptably realistic: the "Chef and Brewer" is an actual chain of English pubs, and the description of Celia's lunch and the football pool collectors is well-observed and convincing. On the other hand, there is no such district in London as "Tyburnia": the name is a portmanteau of "Tyburn" and "Hibernia" intended partly as a joke about Mr. Kelly.²¹ More importantly, though, "Tyburnia" undermines the sense we might have had that Murphy has a straightforwardly realistic background--just as the ludicrous surfeit of detail in the above passage contradicts our impression that Murphy is a carefully edited film from which irrelevancies have been excised. If we accept too readily the illusion of reality Beckett is offering us, we are guilty of simplifying the data available for critical interpretation. At fault is our complacent tendency to overlook details that do not conform to our preconceptions about realistic fiction.

The picture of London, Cork and Dublin that Murphy presents is a counterpart not just to zone one of Murphy's mind but to zone two as well. The second zone is represented partly by fictitious places such as Tyburnia and the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, and also by the character Cooper. In contrast to the novel's other characters, who, though comic grotesques, are still recognisably real people, Cooper is a purely imagined creation. He is not simply a caricature: with his unheard-of infirmity--the inability to sit down or take off his hat--he belongs to a fictional world like that of The Divine Comedy, where the usual physical laws are overturned. Because Murphy never meets him, Cooper is not a part of his "actual" experience; because he never imagines him, or even a character like him, Cooper is not a part of his "virtual" experience either. Through Cooper, Beckett reaffirms both that Murphy's experience is too narrow for the "actual" and "virtual" of his mind to mirror the world accurately, and that our impression that Murphy is a straightforwardly realistic novel is a complacent oversimplification.

Murphy's tendency to simplify his experience is evident not only in his belief that his mind is a microcosm of the world at large, but in his approach to the question of freedom. Partly on the basis of his reading in psychology, Murphy holds that human behaviour is deterministically regulated: thus it is no surprise to find him seeking to confirm one of the findings of the Külpe school of experimental psychology in the act of ordering a cup of tea.

A colleague of Külpe's, Ach, performed experiments to show that in certain conditions people behave deterministically.²² He presented subjects with a series of cards, each with four different letters, and asked them to mention a particular letter, say "S",

whenever it appeared. As each card bearing an "S" was removed from view, the subjects were asked to name the other letters appearing with it. It was found that they had perceived the "S" alone, and had disregarded the other letters. Ach believed their response to the cards had been determined by the experimenter's assigned task. He distinguished four main phases in the task's performance;²³ Murphy remembers three of them as he gives the waitress his order:

"Bring me," [he said], in the voice of an usher resolved to order the chef's special selection for a school outing. He paused after this preparatory signal to let the fore-period develop, that first of the three moments of reaction in which, according to the Külpe school, the major torments of response are undergone. Then he applied the stimulus proper.

"A cup of tea and a packet of assorted biscuits."

. . . As though suddenly aware of the great magical ability, or it might have been the surgical quality, the waitress murmured, before the eddies of the main period drifted her away: "Vera to you, dear." This was not a caress.

Murphy had some faith in the Külpe school. Marbe and Bühler might be deceived, even Watt was only human, but how could Ach be wrong?(Mu, p. 58)²⁴

Vera's response to the stimulus is not a caress (that is, a pleasing mental experience) because it fails to demonstrate that his order has determined her behaviour. Instead of attending strictly to the task presented to her, she has responded to the stimulus of the experimenter--the stimulus, perhaps, of Murphy's sex appeal (his notorious "surgical quality"), or perhaps of his magical gaze, mentioned in his horoscope. Surprised, Murphy asks himself how Ach could be wrong. What he forgets is that Ach performed his experiments in controlled conditions in which the stimulus of the experimenter played no part. Under such conditions, people may behave deterministically; but throughout Murphy, Beckett avoids omnisciently endorsing conclusions about metaphysical issues, and to emphasise that people may also behave freely, ends the scene as

follows: "Vera concluded . . . her performance in much better style than she had begun . . . She actually made out the bill there and then on her own initiative" (Mu, p. 58; my italics). Murphy, we have been shown, is wrong to assume that human behaviour is at all times determined. He has behaved egotistically in treating Vera as the subject of a private experiment rather than as a complex human being worthy of a polite request for biscuits and tea. Characteristically, he is unmoved by the experiment's failure, preferring to ignore evidence that does not accord with his preconceived ideas.

Murphy's enthusiasm for the idea that man behaves deterministically is influenced not only by his interest in experimental psychology, but by his interest in philosophy as well. He is especially attracted to the work of Arnold Geulincx, who holds that our every bodily action is "occasioned" by God's intervention between mind and body. The efficacy of our acts of volition is confined to our mental states: we lack the power to initiate bodily actions, but are free to imagine whatever we please.²⁵

As Richard Coe has observed, Murphy believes that mental-physical interaction is occasioned not by God, but by another source of "supernatural determination" (Mu, p. 77)--the stars.²⁶ The novel opens, as we have seen, with the sun having no alternative but to shine, and Murphy imagining that, having withdrawn into his mind, he is free from astrological influence. But by comparing him to a personified heavenly body that is itself deterministically regulated, Beckett implies that Murphy is mistaken: his attempt to achieve freedom through meditation is presented as futile.

Equally mistaken, though, is the reader who concludes from this that Beckett believes in astrological determinism. At the start of the novel it suits Beckett's purposes to imply that human activity is astrologically regulated; but elsewhere he suggests that the world is (in Schopenhauer's phrase) a "kingdom of chance and error" (WWI, I, 417). Celia meets Murphy for the first time when, "chancing to glance to her right she saw . . . a man. Murphy" (Mu, p. 13). Murphy's job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat is obtained through a chance meeting with Ticklepenny; he dies when a flow of gas is released into his room by someone accidentally pulling the gas chain rather than the lavatory chain. The reader who fails to notice the ambivalence of Beckett's attitude to astrological determinism is as much an object of satire as Murphy, for he is just as guilty of simplifying his experience.

Murphy's sessions in his rocking-chair represent an attempt to achieve not only the temporary freedom afforded by imagination, but ultimately, the permanent freedom he believes to follow from the complete transcendence of worldly desire. Though it has become a critical commonplace to note that his faith in the rewards of self-transcendence derives partly from Geulincx, the way in which Beckett draws Spinoza and Schopenhauer, too, into his satire has not been discussed.²⁷ Geulincx and Spinoza agree that complete self-transcendence is a supreme good; for once an individual has renounced the world, they argue, he is able to discover the will and thought of God and make his volitions conform to divine reason. What the individual achieves, in Geulincx's terms, is "the unique love of right reason," the equivalent, as S.V. Keeling tells us, of Spinoza's "intellectual love of God."²⁸ In both Spinoza and Geulincx love of

God is clearly distinguished from self-love, which is held to be the root of all moral evil. Murphy, however, is either unaware of this, or has dismissed it from mind on the basis that God does not exist. For, as Beckett's parody of Spinoza in the epigraph to chapter six indicates, Murphy's behaviour is based not on the intellectual love of God, but on the love of himself.²⁹

The self he loves is in Schopenhauerian terms his will-less self: Murphy believes that by loving it, he can attain to complete freedom from deterministic influence. As we have already seen, Schopenhauer believes we are all subject to an inner striving force, "the will to live," which drives us unceasingly towards the gratification of physical and psychological needs. The pleasures that accrue from the satisfactions of will are ephemeral: the satisfaction of our desire for food, for example, is inevitably followed by renewed hunger, our desire for power by a yearning for more power, and so on. As will-motivated (or "willing") subjects we consistently treat people as the means to our own well-being. We are all basically selfish.

Yet it is open to us to deny our selfishness. In search of a better life, Schopenhauer notes, the mystic (of whatever persuasion) traditionally dedicates himself to voluntary chastity, renounces all worldly goods, and learns to welcome every "injury, ignominy and insult" (WWI, I, 493) the world has to offer. As a result of his deliberate denial of the will to live, the mystic's willing self languishes, and his latent will-less self--the part of himself that is free from desire--comes to the fore. Paradoxically, the mystic's asceticism is motivated by self-love; it is, however, love of his will-less, rather than of his willing self, that underlies his

behaviour.³⁰ The extreme ascetic undergoes transformation into a "pure, will-less . . . timeless subject of knowledge" (WWI, I, 231). As such, he is completely free from selfish desire, and totally indifferent to the world at large--which for him fades into "[N]othing" (WWI, I, 532).

Murphy eventually experiences "Nothing." But in a careful selection of "filmic" scenes, Beckett demonstrates first, that the path he follows in pursuit of freedom is one of imperfect asceticism; and second, that his assumption that freedom from will is equivalent to freedom of will is mistaken. Early in the novel, Murphy is revealed as too weak to undertake voluntary chastity: though his will-less self wants to deny Celia, his willing self craves for her, and it is in answer to this craving that he agrees to abandon his search for freedom temporarily in order to find work. His failure to cultivate indifference to worldly objects is clear from his attempt to defraud a tea-shop by paying for one cup of tea, but consuming "1.83 cups approximately" (Mu, p. 60). His inability to welcome insult and suffering is revealed in his meeting with Miss Dew: when her dog eats his biscuits--a circumstance a more dedicated ascetic would regard with indifference--Murphy protests loudly and rudely. He is oblivious of Miss Dew's attempts to palliate her loneliness by establishing contact with a stranger.

The episode with Miss Dew parallels Murphy's efforts to befriend Mr. Endon, whose indifference to the world at large he admires. Murphy believes that Mr. Endon's ostensible invitations to chess represent a desire to admit him to the fellowship of those who are wholly immured in mind; but on the night of their last game, he realises for the first time that Mr. Endon is interested only in the

disposition of the players on the board, and is indifferent to his opponent. The result for Murphy is an unprecedented "torment of mind" (Mu, p. 168), followed by an involuntary trance in which he experiences "Nothing." "His . . . senses . . . found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to . . . Nothing. . . ." (Mu, p. 168). In Schopenhauer, this sense of peace is well nigh permanent. But Murphy has reached it by the wrong route, and is thrown into a state of high agitation. After leaving Mr. Endon he finds himself subject to an obscure inner compulsion to remove his clothes and lie naked in the hospital grounds. He tries to call to mind people he has known: Celia, his mother, his father. At best, however, he is only able to picture fragmentary cinematic images: "[s]craps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose . . . as though reeled upward off a spool level with his throat" (Mu, p. 172).

"Seeing" with the mind's eye--the eye of imagination--can be subject, Beckett reveals, to forces beyond one's control, even after one has attained to "Nothing." Earlier in the novel, Beckett has noted that "[in] the days when Murphy was concerned with seeing Miss Counihan, he had had to close his eyes to do so. And even now when he closed them there was no guarantee that Miss Counihan would not appear. That was Murphy's really yellow spot" (Mu, pp. 64-65). Murphy's "yellow" (i.e., weak) spot is his refusal to accept that there can be anything but freedom in the mind.³¹ He is aware that his imagination is not entirely within his control, just as he is aware that in the third zone of his mind, he is not free, but a mote

in the actual/virtual flux. But in his enthusiasm for the idea that freedom is to be gained via self-transcendence, he has chosen to ignore experience that fails to conform to his private amalgam of the theories of Geulincx, Spinoza and Schopenhauer.

While in the hospital grounds, though, he manages to stop the illusory fragments from appearing, and returns to his garret to meditate. En route (introspectively) to his third zone, to the spurious freedom of inner chaos, he becomes unaware of his surroundings, of the gas pouring into his room. Earlier, Murphy had linked "gas" etymologically to "chaos": ironically, it is "excellent gas, superfine chaos" (Mu, p. 173)--the novel's second counterpart to zone three--that causes his death.

Like Murphy, the novel's minor characters come under satiric attack for failing to transcend their drive to satisfy various needs. Cooper and Miss Carridge are satirised for making no attempt to overcome their need for drink and money, respectively; other characters are mocked for their intense and incessant need for either love or friendship. Neary, for example, is tormented initially by unrequited love for Miss Dwyer and then for Miss Counihan; and later, by a desire for Murphy's friendship. When Murphy is not to be found, Neary suffers an anguish of yearning, and is heavily satirised:

He writhed on his back in the bed, yearning for Murphy as though he had never yearned for anything or anyone before. He turned over and buried his face in the pillow. . . . [Keeping] his head resolutely buried and enveloped, he groaned: "Le pou est mort. Vive le pou!" And a little later, being by then almost stifled: "Is there no flea that found at last dies without issue? No keyflea?"

It was from just this consideration that Murphy, while still less than a child, had set out to capture himself, not with anger but with love. This was a stroke of genius that Neary, a Newtonian, could never have dealt himself nor suffered

another to deal him. There seems really very little hope for Neary, he seems doomed to hope unending . . . The fire will not depart from his eye, nor the water from his mouth, as he scratches himself out of one itch into the next, until he shed his mortal mange, supposing that to be permitted. (Mu, pp. 137-38)

Here need is compared to a flea-bite: the sufferer scratches the bite to alleviate the itching, but the flea meanwhile has given birth to another flea, which by biting creates another itch, and so on. Just as there is no end to the fleas' continuing torment, so in Neary's view, there is no end to need. Neary's concept of need derives from Wylie, who uses Proverb 30.15 as a basis for arguing that we are all creatures of need, and that it is our lot no sooner to satisfy one need than to have another take its place. Wylie's theory is self-centred, since it views other people as means rather than ends. Moreover, it is a simplification in that it does not explain, for example, why Celia is allowed to "rest from need" (Mu, p. 175) after Murphy's death; or why Neary's need for Miss Counihan gives way to a need for Murphy, even though Miss Counihan fails to requite Murphy's love. In accordance with Schopenhauer, Beckett implies in the above passage that the cycle of need can be transcended by loving one's will-less self. Neary not only lacks the wit to see this, but is too self-centred to benefit from its being demonstrated to him. He is a "Newtonian" in the sense that he believes, by analogy with Newton's Third Law, that the satisfaction of one need invariably gives rise to the demands of another.

What the transcendence of need presupposes, however, is that man is free--as Beckett acknowledges at the end of the passage. It may be that man is not permitted to "shed his mortal mange": it may be, in other words, that we are the deterministic slaves of need, and

that willed self-transcendence is impossible. If we are free, and some people choose to behave selfishly rather than to deny themselves, the satirist is justified in mocking them. But if we pursue the satisfactions of need deterministically, we cannot be held responsible for our selfishness, and satire is inappropriate. With this consideration in mind, Beckett satirises some of Murphy's characters while arbitrarily sparing others. Thus Neary is attacked for his failure to transcend need, while Wylie, author of the theory to which Neary subscribes, is spared. He is spared in spite of the fact that he is just as selfish as Neary, and as disinclined to asceticism.

Beckett also deliberately alternates between mocking some characters and expressing sympathy for them. He presents Miss Dew, for example, not only as a lonely woman undeserving of Murphy's rudeness, but as a comic grotesque with a charlatan medium's talent for making "the dead softsoap the quick" (Mu, p. 73). Celia, too, is treated ambivalently: Beckett introduces her to us as a comic antithesis to Murphy--as a body, rather than as a mind--but she is ultimately the least satirised character in the novel. According to Ruby Cohn, the reason for this is that Celia's "need of Murphy is less egotistical than that of the others."³² Celia, says Cohn, experiences a "catharsis"³³ following the death of the Old Boy; assuming this to be a mystical catharsis, one could argue that she is ultimately saintly. Yet there is evidence in the novel that Celia's need for Murphy drives her to behave just as selfishly as any of the other characters: though Beckett tries to conceal it, she lies to Murphy about Miss Carridge's unwillingness to cheat Mr. Quigley, in order to force Murphy to look for work.³⁴ In addition, she

inconsiderately neglects the lonely Mr. Kelly after moving in with Murphy, and even appears to contemplate killing herself without thought for her grandfather's feelings.

Beckett's hints that Celia is thinking of suicide are important in relation to what Cohn describes as her "catharsis." The first hint appears in chapter two, when, like the prostitute Martha in David Copperfield, the Dickens character she is partly modelled on, she goes down to the banks of the Thames: "Celia's course was clear: the water. The temptation to enter it was strong, but she set it aside. There would be time for that" (Mu, p. 14).³⁵ Another clue to Celia's intentions is the passage where she tells Miss Carridge that she has been busy: "my swan crossword you know Miss Carridge, seeking the rime, the panting syllable to rime with breath" (Mu, p. 156). The syllable she seeks, of course, is "death".

Clearly, what Beckett is trying to do in these passages is to mislead the "gentle skimmer" (Mu, p. 60)--just as he also tries to mislead us in suggesting that the first twelve chapters of Murphy correspond to the twelve houses of the zodiac, and that the events of the novel are astrologically determined.³⁶ "[All] things hobble together for the only possible" (Mu, p. 155) says Beckett at one point, implying that Murphy could not have worked out differently. The only possible end to Murphy's career of self-love, he suggests, is death. Equally, Celia's love for Murphy could end in no other way but her suicide.

But if we have allowed ourselves to be seduced by Beckett's rhetoric--if we do believe at the end of chapter twelve that this is the only possible end for Celia--chapter thirteen comes as a surprise. Here we find that Celia has not killed herself, but has

returned to the streets, and to visiting Mr. Kelly, instead. The twelfth chapter was to have portended "the only possible," but there are at least two explanations for what actually happens. It may be that Celia's behaviour has been deterministically regulated, though by self-interest rather than by the stars: in Wylie's terms we could say that her need for Murphy has been replaced by a need for Mr. Kelly, and that she has shrunk from suicide through a behaviouristic horror of pain. Alternatively, she may have achieved, by way of self-transcendent meditation, what Murphy and Neary both fail to: it may be that she has experienced a mystical "catharsis" enabling her to "rest from need" (Mu, p. 175) and freely choose to comfort Mr. Kelly in his declining years. Further explanations are possible, based on different assumptions about need and freedom: to accept any one to the exclusion of the rest is to simplify our experience of the novel.

Another surprise in chapter thirteen is Beckett's change of tone. Miss Dew appears in the chapter for the last time, though in a more sympathetic light than earlier. Beckett still scorns her interest in the occult, but in mentioning that her patron, Lord Gall, has threatened to find a new control if she continues to produce unsatisfactory results, presents her more clearly than before as a lonely, pathetic figure. Mr. Kelly, too, is treated more sympathetically. At the start of the chapter, he appears, as earlier in the novel, as a caricatured egotist, with hat too big and coat too small. But when the wind rises suddenly, and his kite blows away, he becomes in pursuit of it a "ghastly, lamentable figure" (Mu, p. 191) Beckett would have us pity.

Whether Mr. Kelly and Miss Dew enjoy freedom of will is not at issue in the chapter; yet it is clear that they both lack the power to control their environment in a way that would ensure happiness. Miss Dew cannot command the spirits to Lord Gall's satisfaction; Mr. Kelly is powerless to control the wind. Soon the latter will die, unable to prevent the imminent failure of his now "tired heart" (Mu, p. 192), and Celia will be left alone. If she had married Murphy and been permitted to leave her sordid profession, she might have found comfort in a child--a child, perhaps, who enjoyed flying kites. But like the other characters, she has been unable to control the course of events, and Beckett's description of her wheeling Mr. Kelly out of the park at closing time, at the command of the attendants, emphasises how little life has in store for her now. "Celia toiled along the narrow path into the teeth of the wind, then faced north up the wide hill. There was no shorter way home. The yellow hair fell across her face . . . She closed her eyes. All out" (Mu, p. 192). Celia's case is especially pathetic, because she can do nothing to prevent the death of her grandfather, and lacks the financial and educational resources to start a new life for herself in any but a futureless job. It is this fact, rather than Beckett's satiric arbitrariness, or (as Ruby Cohn has suggested) Celia's relative selflessness, that accounts for her being treated with special sympathy throughout the novel.

Beckett's extension of that sympathy in the last chapter to Miss Dew and Mr. Kelly is in fact an expression of sympathy for mankind as a whole. For the command "All out" applies not only to Celia, but to humanity generally: whether free or not, none of us can control all the forces that limit our enjoyment of life, or defy nature's command

to depart from it. In its earlier chapters Murphy is a sardonically omniscient author's demonstration of the impossibility of answering metaphysical questions. But in the final chapter, Beckett allows his satiric mask to drop, and ends the novel as a lament--a personal and sincere, rather than omnisciently ironic lament--for man's inability to determine his own happiness and his impotence in the face of death.

3

Murphy is Beckett's first major novel. Its approach to satire and characterisation is more polished than that of either "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" or More Pricks Than Kicks, and its exploration of the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge is more sophisticated, for it is the first of Beckett's novels to embody his interest in complex philosophical issues. Like his earlier novels, however, Murphy is an original work: rather than simply expound the theories of various philosophers, it uses them to make its own point about the impossibility of finding definitive answers to metaphysical questions. Beckett adopts an equally original approach to the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge when he renews his attack on the "gentle skimmer" in Watt, the subject of the chapter to follow.

NOTES

¹See Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 196.

²Bair, pp. 234, 269, 284.

³"Schwabenstreich" [Review of Eduard Moerike's Mozart on the Way to Prague], The Spectator, No. 5517 (23 March 1934), 472; "Proust in Pieces" [Review of Albert Feuillerat's Comment Proust a composé son roman], The Spectator, No. 5530 (23 June 1934), 975-76; "[Review of] Poems, by Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. J.B. Leishmann [sic], The Criterion, 13 (July 1934), 705-07; "Humanistic Quietism," [Review of Poems, by Thomas McGreevy], Dublin Magazine, NS 9 (July-Sept., 1934), 79-80; "Recent Irish Poetry," The Bookman, 86 (August, 1934), 235-36 (published under the pseudonym "Andrew Belis"); "Ex Cathezra" [Review of Ezra Pound's Make It New]/ "Papini's Dante" [Review of Giovanni Papini's Dante Vivo, trans. Eleanor Hammond Broadus and Anna Benedetti]/ "The Essential and the Incidental" [Review of Sean O'Casey's Windfalls], The Bookman, 87 (Christmas, 1934), 10, 14, 111; "An Imaginative Work!" [Review of Jack B. Yeats' The Amaranthers], Dublin Magazine, NS 11 (July-Sept., 1936), 80-81; "Denis Devlin" [Review of Denis Devlin's Intercessions], Transition: Tenth Anniversary, 27 (April-May, 1938), 289-94. All ten essays have been reprinted in Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983). Also published (for the first time) in Cohn's collection are a letter Beckett wrote to a German friend, Axel Kaun, in 1937; an essay entitled "Les Deux Besoins," which was written in 1938 or 1939 (see Richard Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 105-06); and an essay entitled "Censorship in the Saorstat," ca. 1935-36 (see Admussen, p. 105). In addition to the essays, Beckett wrote a short story, "A Case in a Thousand," which was published in The Bookman, 86 (August 1934), 241-42, and which has never been reprinted.

⁴Nicholas Zurbrugg, "From 'Gleam' to 'Gloom': the Volte Face between the Criticism and Fiction of Samuel Beckett," AUMLA, 55 (May 1981), 24. The four reviews to which Zurbrugg refers are "Schwabenstreich," "Proust in Pieces," "The Essential and the Incidental," and "An Imaginative Work!"

⁵All quotations from "Denis Devlin" are from Disjecta, ed. Ruby Cohn; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by DD. In "Les Deux Besoins," (Disjecta, pp. 55-57), Beckett similarly identifies "Deux besoins, dont le produit fait l'art" (p. 55).

⁶Beckett italicises "gulf" in his essay; I have removed the italics here, since they are unnecessary for my purposes.

⁷All quotations from "Recent Irish Poetry" are from Disjecta, ed. Ruby Cohn; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by RIP.

⁸See Leonard Zusne, Names in the History of Psychology (New York: Hemisphere, 1975), pp. 261-62.

⁹Cf. WWI, II, 384, where Schopenhauer says that "the investigator must turn his glance inward; for the intellectual and ethical phenomena are more important than the physical. . . . The last fundamental secret man carries within himself, and this is accessible to him in the most immediate manner; therefore it is only here that he can hope to find the key to the riddle of the world and gain a clue to the nature of all things." See, too, Schopenhauer's essay, "On Aesthetics," where he says that the art of the novel "lies in setting the inner life into the most violent motion with the smallest possible expenditure of outer life: for it is the inner life which is the real object of our interest." (In Arthur Schopenhauer, Essays and Aphorisms, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p. 165). Consistent with this statement of Schopenhauer's is Beckett's (distinctly minor) short story, "A Case in a Thousand," The Bookman, 86 (August, 1934), 241-42, which concerns the inner life of a mysterious Dr. Nye. By coincidence, Dr. Nye meets his childhood nurse, a Mrs. Bray, in connection with a case that concerns him; Mrs. Bray tells him about "a matter connected with his earliest years . . . from the elucidation of which" (p. 242) he is able to learn something of importance about himself. (Exactly what he learns is, however, never made clear).

¹⁰All quotations from Murphy are from the Calder & Boyars edition (London, 1970). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by Mu.

¹¹See "An Elucidation Concerning the Monads," (1714; rpt. in The Monadology of Leibniz, trans. H.W. Carr (London: Favil Press, 1930)), p. 151, where Leibniz writes that each mind is a "living mirror" of the universe. See also "The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Founded on Reason," (1714; rpt. in The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings, ed. Robert Latta (London: Oxford U.P., 1898)), pp. 420-21, where Leibniz observes that, of God, "[it] has been very well said that as a centre, He is everywhere, but His circumference is nowhere." Various philosophers before Leibniz also hold the mind to be a microcosm, or monad; but Beckett emphasises Murphy's special interest in Leibniz in his French translation of the novel. (See Murphy (Paris: Minuit, 1947), p. 119.

¹²"The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Founded on Reason," p. 421.

¹³See St. Augustine, The Confessions, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), Book XII.

¹⁴The Principles of Psychology (London: Macmillan, 1902), I, 488. In The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 99, n32, Rubin Rabinovitz observes that James also speaks of the "great blooming buzzing confusion" in "The World We Live In," an essay included in The Philosophy of William James (New York: Modern Library, 1953), p. 76.

"The phrase did not really originate with James," Rabinovitz comments. "[H]e says it was first used by another, unnamed person."

¹⁵Robert I. Watson, The Great Philosophers from Aristotle to Freud (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1968), p. 439.

¹⁶Solomon E. Asch, "Gestalt Theory," in The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. David Sills (London: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968), VI, 168.

¹⁷"On the Antithesis of the Thing in Itself and Appearance," in Essays and Aphorisms, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 58.

¹⁸See WWI, II, 336.

¹⁹The "Griffith" in this passage is of course D.W. Griffith, whose early silent films are described by Ernest Lindgren in The Art of Film (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 72-75. Bair, pp. 204-05, reveals that Beckett's interest in silent film was such that he wrote to Eisenstein and Pudovkin in 1936 to see if he could work with them. Neither producer replied to his letters.

²⁰See Malcolm Stuart, "Notes on Place and Place Names in Murphy," RANAM, 14 (1981), 227-35. See also J.C.C. Mays, "Mythologized Presences: Murphy in its Time," in Myth and Reality in Irish Literature, ed. Joseph Ronsley (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier U.P., 1977), pp. 197-218. Mays suggests that some of Murphy's characters are based on real-life citizens of Dublin whom Beckett knew.

²¹Tyburn is, of course, the place in London where criminals were publicly hanged; "Hibernia" is another name for Ireland. Beckett is hinting not only that Tyburnia is Mr. Kelly's bit of Ireland in England, but that life for him is not, as for John Gay (see his couplet, "My Own Epitaph"), a jest, but a choke. In the beginning was the pun!

²²See George Humphrey's Thinking: an Introduction to its Experimental Psychology (London: Methuen, 1951), pp. 68-83.

²³Ibid., p. 68.

²⁴The reference here is not to the character Watt of Beckett's next novel, but to the psychologist H.J. Watt, whose work is discussed in Humphrey.

²⁵See S.V. Keeling, Descartes (London: Oxford U.P., 1968), p. 234.

²⁶See Richard Coe, Beckett (London/Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 30.

²⁷Hugh Kenner was the first critic to discuss at length the part played by Geulincx in Murphy: see Samuel Beckett: a Critical Study

(London: Calder, 1962), pp. 83-84. Most subsequent discussions of the novel make some mention of this philosopher, but do not comment as I do on the role played by Spinoza and Schopenhauer in Beckett's satire.

²⁸Keeling, p. 234.

²⁹The epigraph is a parody of Spinoza's well-known proposition, "Deus se ipsum amore intellectuali infinito amat," Book V, Prop. 35 of "Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata."

³⁰In WWI, I, 504, Schopenhauer describes the will-less self as "our better self." Significantly, Beckett tells us in chapter five that "[the] only thing Murphy was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration--the best of himself" (Mu, p. 52). The implication is that Murphy has found in Schopenhauer, as an adult, both purpose and justification for his childhood tendency to asceticism.

³¹This is, of course, a variation on the idea that all is yellow to the jaundiced eye.

³²Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 47.

³³Ibid.

³⁴At the start of chapter five, Beckett describes Miss Carridge as being "a woman of such astute rectitude that she not only refused to cook the bill for Mr. Quigley, but threatened to inform that poor gentleman of how she had been tempted" (Mu, p. 47). Since it is Beckett who conveys this information to us, rather than Celia, we accept it as true. But later, when Celia is negotiating with Miss Carridge to rent the Old Boy's room, it emerges that Celia and Miss Carridge have been swindling Mr. Quigley all along, without Murphy's being aware of it (see Mu, p. 102). Clearly, the earlier description of Miss Carridge as a woman of principle was Celia's rather than Beckett's. Beckett has tried to protect her from the reader's disapproval via a narrative sleight-of-hand.

³⁵Cf. David Copperfield (1849-50; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 749. Celia is not the only character to owe something to this novel. Like David, Murphy is born with a caul on his head; Miss Dew resembles Miss Mowcher; and as Victor Sage has pointed out in "Dickens and Beckett: Two Uses of Materialism," Journal of Beckett Studies, 2 (Summer 1977), 19, Mr. Kelly is based on Mr. Dick.

³⁶In Samuel Beckett's Murphy: a Critical Excursion (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1968), p. 76, Robert Harrison argues convincingly that the first twelve chapters of Murphy "occupy, in sequence, each of the twelve houses of the zodiac, beginning with the House of the Native . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

WATT AND THE GENTLE SKIMMER

1

Beckett wrote his next novel, Watt, during the forties, while in hiding from the Nazis in Vichy France. He completed it in 1945, but had difficulty in finding a publisher willing to take it; finally it was accepted by Olympia Press, in Paris, under the mistaken impression that it was pornographic, and was published in 1953.¹ Apart from a humorous passage describing the main character's dalliance with a fishwife, and a rather far-fetched account of a cure for impotence, Watt has little to do with sex; instead, it is largely concerned, as Murphy is, with what experimental psychology has to tell us about the limits of human knowledge. But whereas in the earlier novel, Beckett draws attention to his interest in psychology by, for example, alluding directly to the Külpe school when Murphy conducts his private experiment on Vera, or by having his characters make use of terms like "figure and ground" or "the big blooming buzzing confusion," in Watt he discloses his interest obliquely.

Hugh Culik has noted that the novel's main character is named partly after the psychologist H.J. Watt, who is mentioned in Murphy, and the Galls, father and son, after the phrenologist Franz Joseph Gall.² Culik argues that Beckett's choice of names has a bearing on Watt's eventual collapse into an aphasic state, a state in which his

speech becomes radically disordered, for Watt and Gall both took an interest in the speech functions of the human brain.³ But although Watt's grammatical and lexical inversions are an important aspect of the novel, even more important is Beckett's inclusion in it of a figure illustrative of a basic principle of Gestalt psychology, a figure Culik does not mention. The figure in question is the circle with the broken circumference in the picture in Erskine's room.

Early this century, certain Gestalt psychologists conducted experiments to show that the human mind tends to simplify the sense data presented to it for the sake of forming intelligible perceptual wholes.⁴ Presented with a triangle with only two vertices joined together, with a rectangle two of whose sides do not meet at one of the corners, or with a circle whose circumference is flawed by a gap, the mind feels impelled to fill in what is missing and form an image of a triangle, a rectangle or a circle, respectively. According to one psychologist, John Dewey, problem solving is analogous to perception: the mind reduces a given problem to "a partial pattern indicating more or less adequately the way it is to be completed," and makes use of reasoning or insight "to bridge the exposed gap."⁵ Problem solving is essentially a matter of simplifying the available data; as Watt's puzzlement over the picture in Erskine's room illustrates, problem solvers must beware the dangers of oversimplification and distortion. Readers who are less than wary in their efforts to solve the narrative problems Beckett poses in Watt will find that, as in Murphy, they are guilty of behaving as "gentle skimmer[s]" (Mu, p. 60).

"A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point" dominates the foreground of the picture. "In the

eastern background appeared a point, or dot. The circumference was black. The point was blue, but blue! The rest was white (W, p. 126).⁶ The picture creates an effect of perspective, so that, as he looks at it, Watt wonders "how long it would be before the point and circle entered together upon the same plane. . . . And was it not rather the circle that was in the background, and the point that was in the foreground?" (W, p. 127). Here Watt is attempting to establish which part of the picture should be regarded as figure and which as ground.⁷ The circle may be taken to be in the foreground and the point in the background or vice-versa; in either case, Watt's perception is a simplification of the available data, because the figure-ground distinction is always such a simplification. Avoiding the distinction altogether is out of the question, for experimental psychologists have established that the perceptual field in any given situation "cannot be experienced simultaneously as figure and as ground."⁸

Watt embarks on further simplification when he assumes that the point is the centre of a circle--perhaps the centre of the circle in the picture--even though there is no evidence to support this. He then entertains a number of possibilities as to what the artist had intended to represent: he wonders whether the picture is of a centre in search of its circle, or a circle in search of its centre, or some other combination of this kind. At the thought that it is perhaps "a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time," we are told, "[his] eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow" (W, p. 127).

Watt is distressed at the thought that there might be a blue centre and a black circle hopelessly in search of a blue circle and black centre, respectively, in boundless space and endless time. Yet he is unnecessarily upset, for his solutions to the problems posed by the picture are incorrect. His assumption that the blue point is the centre of a circle arises from wondering "what the artist had intended to represent"; the narrator's comment that "Watt knew nothing about painting" (W, p. 127) suggests, however, that Watt has made a mistake in assuming that paintings are always intended to be representational. Similarly, his anxieties about a circle searching for its centre in boundless space and endless time are undercut by the further comment that "Watt knew nothing about physics" (W, p. 127). If he knew anything about the theory of relativity, he would be aware that it runs counter to the notion of infinite space and time coexisting together.⁹ By simplifying his perceptual experience and proceeding on a series of incorrect assumptions, Watt has fallen into error.

Throughout the novel, the closed circle is an image of spurious completeness, and the broken circle of true-to-life complexity. Thus, when in Part II Watt remembers hearing three frogs croaking Krak! Krek! and Krik! in 360 intervals, and coming together at last in the final interval, we recognise that he is distorting the data presented to him. Frogs croak at random, not in the pattern Watt remembers: the 360 intervals, corresponding to the 360 degrees in a circle, are a simplification of the "big blooming buzzing confusion" of his auditory experience. Truer to life is the threne he hears (or perhaps imagines) in Part I, which tells of successive generations of people being born, living and dying in a circle broken by the fact

that the death of any one individual does not necessarily coincide with the birth of another. The numbers mentioned in the first and second verses--52.285714 and 52.1428571^{10} --are the decimal equivalents of the number of weeks in a leap year and an ordinary year, respectively. These irrational numbers form a counterpart to the intrinsic irrationality of the coming and going of successive generations. Each generation finds certain rewards in life--there is "a big fat bun/ for everyone" (W, p. 33)--but each is bound towards the same destination: death.

2

The mistakes Watt makes about the picture of the circle are more elaborate than the perceptual mistake involved in reporting that a circle with a broken circumference is a complete circle, or a triangle with two unjoined vertices a complete triangle. However, the same principle is at work--that of perceptual simplification--and Beckett's interest in this principle is evident from the abundance of circles in Watt. Whether broken or unbroken, these are included in the novel to test not only Watt's but also the reader's perceptual and problem-solving abilities.

The largest of the circles is the broken one described by the novel itself: Watt begins with its titular character taking the train from Dublin to Mr. Knott's house and ends just prior to his return to Dublin. The narrative takes us almost--but not quite--back to its starting-point, and challenges us to solve the problems embodied in it without being, as in Murphy, "gentle skimmers," guilty of oversimplifying or distorting our reading experience. The broken

circle that is Watt mimics the complexity and irrationality of life, tempting us to bridge the narrative "gaps" it has to offer, yet constantly reminding us that we bridge them at the risk of distortion and oversimplification. Thus when we try, for example, to solve the problems presented by the novel's chronology and narrative viewpoint, we discover that it is all too easy to underestimate their complexity.

The last of the novel's four parts opens with the following statement: "As Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told its end. Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story. Heroic quatrains are not otherwise elaborated" (W, p. 214). Most critics assume that the voice that utters this statement belongs to the character Sam, who in the third part of the novel emerges as someone who has known Watt and has heard him tell of the time he spent in the service of Mr. Knott. But Sam is a first-person narrator, where, by contrast, the narrator of Part IV is a third-person narrator possessed of varying degrees of omniscience. At times in Part IV, this narrator enters the minds of minor characters to reveal their thoughts; at other times he seems strangely uncertain of himself, as for example when he comments that

Mr. Case was reading a book: Songs by the Way, by George Russell (A.E.). . . .

Mr. Case read:

? (W, p. 227)

Yet the narrator is also able to tell us that on his way to the station, Watt "met no human being. . . . A strayed ass, or goat, lying in the ditch, in the shadow, raised its head, as he passed. Watt did not see the ass, or goat, but the ass, or goat, saw Watt"

(W, p. 222). As Mathew Winston has observed, the narrator's erratic omniscience extends here to the point where he can enter the mind of an ass or a goat, but not--strangely--to where he can be certain which kind of animal saw Watt on the road.¹¹

The Part IV narrator's various uncertainties prompt us to ask ourselves whether he is in a position to comment authoritatively on the chronology of Watt's story. When he says that "Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second . . .," we assume that "the beginning" refers to the chronological beginning of his story. However, this need not be the case: in Part III of the novel, we have discovered that, as he told his story to Sam, Watt inverted the words in sentences, the letters in words and so on; it may well be that he also inverted the chronology.¹² Thus the statement that begins Part IV, and seems at first sight a helpful guide to the order in which the events in Watt take place (an indication that Part III of the novel follows Part IV chronologically) may not be so helpful after all. While it might have seemed important to be told that the four parts of the story resemble heroic quatrains, whatever efforts we make to determine in what sense this is true are frustrated by the fact that we cannot say in what order Watt told the story, and also by the fact that the four parts of his story do not necessarily correspond to the four parts of the novel.¹³

This last becomes clear in light of the narrative viewpoint employed in each part of Watt. Mathew Winston speaks for a good many critics of the novel when he says that its first footnote and various other narrative devices are "evidence of the shaping that has been done by someone who has chosen an unusual narrative technique and has felt the need to comment on its peculiarity. This person appears as

a character in the third chapter of Watt, tells of his interaction with the book's ostensible protagonist, and is given a name, Sam."¹⁴ Sam tells us in Part III that he noted Watt's story down in his "little notebook" (W, p. 163) as Watt told it to him. That Sam added the first and subsequent footnotes to the story when he went back to edit his notebook is suggested by the first footnote itself in Part I, which states that the "plethoric reflexive pronoun after say" (W, p. 6) will be avoided throughout the novel (as it is); by various other footnotes; and by the interjections "Hiatus in MS." and "MS. illegible" (W, pp. 238, 240). On the other hand, there is no compelling reason to suppose that Sam is both the author and the editor of the notebook: the editing may have been done by someone else altogether--by that other Sam, Samuel Beckett, for example.

Nor is it clear that the entire novel derives from Sam's notebook. It is, as we have seen, unlikely that Sam is the author of Part IV, since the narrator of that part is to varying extents omniscient. It is also unlikely that he is the narrator of Part I, for that narrator behaves as though he were omniscient rather than humanly fallible when in the novel's opening pages he tells us about Mr. Hackett and the Nixons coming together to discuss Watt. Here he adopts the convention of making us privy to the thoughts of one character, Mr. Hackett, and presents the scene from his point of view. From listening to Watt's story, Sam cannot possibly know what passed through Mr. Hackett's mind as he spoke to the Nixons, because Watt is not omniscient; nor can he know what Mr. Hackett and the Nixons said to each other prior to meeting Watt, because Watt was not present to hear what they said.

Moreover, it seems highly improbable that Watt could have remembered Arsene's lengthy speech near the end of Part I in the detail in which the narrator reports it. If we assume that Watt is gifted with perfect recall, that assumption is undermined in Part II, when the narrator says that "Watt thought sometimes of Arsene. He wondered what Arsene had meant, nay, he wondered what Arsene had said, on the evening of his departure. For his declaration had entered Watt's ears only by fits, and his understanding . . . hardly at all" (W, p. 77). This statement is countered in the Addenda--a collection of narrative scraps at the conclusion of the main body of the novel--by the comment, "Note that Arsene's declaration gradually came back to Watt" (W, p. 248); however, as the single footnote to the Addenda tells us, this is really only an idea for a change to Watt that might have been made under different circumstances. As it is, "fatigue and disgust" (W, p. 247) have intervened to prevent the change from being incorporated into the text.

While it seems that Sam is the narrator of Part II as well as Part III, this is by no means certain. The first-person narrator of the second part of the novel speaks as though he were Sam of "the period of Watt's revelation to me" (W, p. 76); he comments that "[t]here were times when Watt could reason rapidly, almost as rapidly as Mr. Nackybal" (W, p. 129), a character who appears in Part III; and he emphasises that "all . . . I know on the subject of Mr. Knott, and of all that touched Mr. Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and of all that touched Watt, came from Watt, and from Watt alone" (W, p. 123). On the other hand, the narrator of Part II never actually refers to himself as Sam, and never satisfactorily accounts for the fact that he is able to provide us with the kind of detail about Watt

we might expect from an omniscient narrator. Like Sam, he claims to have a "little notebook" in which he noted down everything Watt told him; yet he freely admits that he

may . . . have left out some of the things that Watt told me, or foisted in others that Watt never told me, though I was most careful to note down all at the time, in my little notebook. It is so difficult, with a long story like the story that Watt told, even when one is most careful to note down all at the time, in one's little notebook, not to leave out some of the things that were told, and not to foist in other things that were never told, never never told at all. (W, pp. 124-25)

How much of Part II consists of what Watt has told the narrator, as opposed to what the narrator has "foisted in," never having been told it at all, is impossible to determine. While Part II may be almost entirely the invention of the first-person narrator, the erratically omniscient viewpoint adopted in Parts I and IV argues against their being parts of the story Watt told to Sam; and as in Part II, so also in Part III, it is unclear how much of what we are told is Watt's story and how much is not. Hence the difficulty involved in asserting that the four parts of the story Watt tells correspond to the four parts of the novel: the reader who assumes too readily that Sam is the narrator of the whole novel will ultimately find that he is a "gentle skimmer," guilty of underestimating Watt's complexity.

3

In a first-person novel it is always important to discover as much as possible about the narrator in order to evaluate the statements he makes about the other characters. When in Part III of Watt we come upon various hints that Watt told his story to Sam when

the two were inmates of a mental asylum, we find ourselves, as would-be attentive readers, confronted with a number of problems.

Sam begins Part III by saying that he and Watt emerged from their "mansions" (W, p. 149)--Boswell's word for the cells of Bedlam¹⁵--to be together, the one to tell his story, the other to record it, only when the weather was agreeable to both. How they knew which days were appropriate (Sam preferring high wind and Watt bright sun) Sam is hard pressed to explain, for in their respective mansions neither of them could "hear the wind, nor see the sun, . . . [a]nd it was of course impossible to have any confidence in the metereological information of our attendants" (W, p. 150). However, when the weather was right they came together rather than have anything to do with "the other scum, cluttering up the passageways, the hallways, grossly loud, blatantly morose" (W, p. 150); and at each meeting Sam took careful note in his "little notebook" (W, p. 163) of what Watt had to say.

Watt's voice was at this time "low and rapid," Sam says, and he spoke "as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text, by long repetition become familiar. Of this impetuous murmur much fell in vain on my imperfect hearing and understanding, and much by the rushing wind was carried away, and lost for ever" (W, pp. 153-54). In addition, Watt "spoke . . . with scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation [and] for enunciation" (W, p. 154): Sam records that in eight stages Watt moved from inverting the order of the words in his sentences to inverting every conceivable aspect of his sentences. Hugh Culik has shown that Watt's speech inversions are consistent with his being aphasic, and that in describing the inversions, Sam uses the terms an aphasiologist would.¹⁶ Yet even if

Sam is a trained aphasiologist, it seems unlikely that he could have translated all Watt's utterances into intelligible English and recorded them accurately in his "little notebook." Indeed, Sam admits that he missed a great deal of what Watt had to tell him as he grew used to each new inversion--so that as in the case of Parts I, II and IV, it is impossible for us to determine how much of Part III is an accurate rendition of Watt's story and how much is not. The problem is further complicated by something Culik does not mention, but which we must not overlook if we are to avoid being "gentle skimmers": the fact that Sam is aphasic, too.¹⁷

In the course of performing figure-ground experiments, Edgar Rubin discovered that certain types of aphasia are "extreme instances of the reversal of the normal figure-ground relationships."¹⁸ Sam reverses normal figure-ground relationships in Part III when he tells us about Watt: rather than make the distinctions between important and unimportant information that would be emphasised by a conventional first-person narrator, he turns such distinctions around, dwelling at great length on the unimportant and often losing the important in a welter of detail. Thus he spends over two pages pondering on how the holes in the fence were formed that allowed him to pass through to Watt's pavilion and visit him:

. . . I said [to myself] that no boar had made these holes, nor any bull, but the stress of weather, particularly violent just here. For where was the boar, where the bull, capable, after bursting a hole in the first fence, of bursting a second, exactly similar, in the second?

.

Nor was it likely that the two holes, the hole in Watt's fence and the hole in mine, had been burst, on the same occasion, by two infuriated bulls, or by two infuriated boars, or by one infuriated bull and one infuriated cow, or by one infuriated boar and one infuriated sow (for that they had been burst, simultaneously, the one by an infuriated bull and the other by

an infuriated sow, or the one by an infuriated boar and the other by an infuriated cow, was hard to believe), charging with hostile or libidinous intent, the one from Watt's side of Watt's fence, the other from mine of mine, and clashing, the holes once burst, at the spot where now I stood, trying to understand. (W, pp. 158-60)

Clearly it is far less important how the holes in the fence were formed than that they were formed at all; yet this is lost on Sam, who reverses the normal figure-ground, relevant-irrelevant relationship in reporting to us how he was able to visit Watt. Moreover, the fact that this relationship is reversed again in Part III in the story of Louit--a story of minimal relevance to Watt--and that there is a further inordinate preoccupation with the unimportant within that story, when we are given a seemingly endless list of permutations of the members of a committee exchanging glances, suggests that the conduct of the narrative in Part III is dictated by Sam's aphasia.

Whether Sam is the narrator of Parts I, II and IV of Watt is unclear; however, each of these parts of the novel contains passages in which the figure-ground relationship we associate with conventional narrative is similarly reversed. Thus the narrator of Part I dwells, through Arsene, on the case of the "increeping and outbouncing house- and parlour-maids" (W, p. 49) at the expense of what would be more important information in a conventional novel; the narrator of Part II feels obliged to go into great detail about the Lynch family instead of telling us more about Watt; and the narrator of Part IV provides us with an exhaustive account of Mr. Case's inconsequential conversation with Mr. Gorman, leaving Watt distinctly in the background. The task of the reader in each part of the novel is to make sense of these reversals of the usual figure-

ground relationship without doing violence to the text; the reader who oversimplifies or distorts their significance will find on closer examination that he is guilty of being a "gentle skimmer."

One especially important instance of figure-ground reversal is Sam's account of Watt's progressive linguistic inversions in Part III, for here Sam offers some interesting hints as to why Watt chose to spend time in the service of Mr. Knott. Though a brief account of each inversion is all that is needed to demonstrate that Watt is aphasic, Sam goes into enormous detail. His few examples of Watt's inversions are of greater interest than the nature of the inversions, but he cites the examples only in passing. When translated into ordinary English, two in particular seem to shed light on the purpose of Watt's period of service at Mr. Knott's house, a topic central to the novel as a whole. The first of these illustrates Watt's tendency to invert the sentences in the period; re-inverted, it reads as follows:

Abandoned my little to find him. My little to learn him forgot. My little rejected to have him. To love him my little reviled. This body homeless. This mind ignoring. These emptied hands. This emptied heart. To him I brought. To the temple. To the teacher. To the source. Of nought. (W, p. 164)

The second example is of Watt's inversion of the words in the sentence together with the letters in the word. Translated, it reads:

Wat did need? Knot. Wat ad got? Knot. Was kup ful? Pah!
But did need? Praps not. But ad got? Know not. (W, p. 164)¹⁹

If we assume that the "him" of the first passage is Mr. Knott, it would appear that Watt's purpose in undertaking a period of service at Mr. Knott's house was an essentially religious one. Watt

seems at one time to have considered Mr. Knott to be the sort of spiritual figure who could teach him to live the ascetic life--the life that, according to Schopenhauer, leads ultimately to the mystic's experience of "nought," or Nothing. The second passage suggests, however, that the time with Mr. Knott ended inconclusively: Watt has left not with his spiritual cup running over--not with the sense of ecstasy that attends the experience of Nothing--but with a strange sense of uncertainty about what has happened to him.

There are further hints in Part I that Watt has some religious purpose in entering Mr. Knott's service. As Francis Doherty has observed, the novel begins with a section in which Beckett parodies the conventional novelist's technique of "narrowing a group of people to a common focus, a united concern with the central character."²⁰ One of the characters, Mr. Hackett, closely questions another, Mr. Nixon, about Watt, but learns nothing from him:

I really know nothing, said Mr. Nixon.
But you must know something, said Mr. Hackett. . . .
Nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means
of existence, distinctive signs, you cannot be in ignorance of
all this.

Utter ignorance, said Mr. Nixon. (W, p. 19)

Earlier, however, Mr. Nixon has said of Watt that "a milder, more inoffensive creature does not exist. . . . He would literally turn the other cheek, I honestly believe, if he had the energy" (W, p. 18). Here Watt is presented as being a man of Christ-like forbearance; nor is the attentive reader surprised to find that Watt's journey to Mr. Knott's house forms a fairly close parallel with the Stations of the Cross.²¹ On his way there he makes a "providential escape" (W, p. 30) from injury when Lady McCann throws

a rock at his head, but hits only his hat; throughout the novel, he hears inner "voices," like some of the Christian mystics.²²

The idea that Watt's sojourn with Mr. Knott is a mystical quest ending in failure and disillusionment is suggested at greater length by Arsene: indeed, so extended are Arsene's hints to this effect that it seems perilous to ignore them. Yet Beckett's use of the word "confession" in the above passage in place of the correct "profession" is a warning that Beckett may well be using Arsene to set an elaborate trap for the "gentle skimmer."²³

Arsene is one of a series of servants engaged by Mr. Knott, and in the course of his "short statement" (W, p. 37) to Watt about what is involved in being one of Mr. Knott's employees, he reveals that he himself has just come to the end of a mystical quest. As he describes what has happened, he uses the third-person pronoun in a way that suggests that every servant of Mr. Knott has much the same experience. When the servant-to-be first arrives, says Arsene,

he knows he is in the right place, at last. And he knows he is the right man, at last. . . . He feels it. The sensations, the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable, of imminent harmony, when all outside him will be he, the flowers the flowers that he is among him, the sky the sky that he is above him, the earth trodden the earth treading, and all sound his echo. When in a word he will be in his midst at last, after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter. (W, p. 39)

In other words, the newly-arrived servant experiences the premonition that he will eventually find himself at one with the world around him. Moreover, he soon realises that to achieve this state--the extrovertive mystical state, as opposed to the introvertive experience of Nothing²⁴--he must dedicate himself to the performance of a variety of mundane tasks. He is "calm and glad . . . [as] he goes about his work" (W, p. 40) because he realises

that these tasks are a form of self-mortification which will eventually earn him a valuable spiritual reward, the extrovertive mystic's experience of being at one with the universe. Self-mortification is essential, for if the servant simply continues to live (as most people do) a life devoted to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, he will not only be denied the experience of the mystic, but will find himself caught up in a ceaseless round of desire, attainment and disappointment.²⁵ The individual who wishes to attain to spiritual felicity must ascend an ascetic "ladder," each step representing a virtue that must be acquired or a vice that must be eradicated.²⁶

At the top of the ladder the individual reaches the highest point a mystic can reach, where he experiences a profound and lasting sense of peace—"a peace," as Schopenhauer says, "that cannot be shaken, a deep rest and inward serenity . . ." (WWI, I, 503-04). Arsene tells of a time when he sat in the sun, basking in this sense of peace and of being at one, as an extrovertive mystic, with the universe:

I was in the sun, and the wall was in the sun. I was the sun, need I add, and the wall, and the step, and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day, to mention only these. . . I felt my breast swell, like a pelican's I think it is. For joy? Well, no, perhaps not exactly for joy. For the change of which I speak had not yet taken place. Hymeneal still it lay, the thing so soon to be changed, between me and all the forgotten horrors of joy. (W, pp. 40-41)

Though the "horrors of joy"—the joy of momentary, pre-ascetic attainment of desire—are for Arsene a thing of the past, he has not attained to the permanent sense of peace that mystics experience at the top of the ascetic ladder. His tranquillity is disturbed by a curious psychological change:

What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, I for, I have taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again. As when a man, having found at last what he sought, a woman, for example, or a friend, loses it, or realizes what it is. (W, pp. 42-43)

Suddenly, and without warning, Arsene finds that instead of being at the top of the ascetic ladder, he is once again at the bottom. He has undergone a "reversed metamorphosis": that is, he has been returned to the situation of a Daphne fleeing pain rather than being allowed to continue as an ascetic whose voluntary self-mortification has been rewarded with a profound sense of inner peace.²⁷

Near the end of his "short statement" Arsene reveals that Mr. Knott tends to draw towards him "two types of men, and two only, on the one hand the big bony seedy shabby haggard knock-kneed type, with the decayed teeth and the big red nose, and on the other the small fat seedy shabby oily or juicy bandy-legged type, with the little fat bottom and belly sticking out in opposite directions . . ." (W, pp. 59-60). The two servants Mr. Knott retains at any given time may each be a different type or may both be the same: in any case, they spend their time looking after their employer, "eternally turning about [him] in tireless love" (W, p. 61). With this description Arsene implies that Mr. Knott inspires in his servants a sense of devotion similar to what the Judaeo-Christian God has traditionally inspired in those who believe in him. Thus when we turn to Part II of the novel we expect to find Watt devoting himself to Mr. Knott just as previous servants have done, and we also expect him to undertake a period of asceticism as a means to achieving the supreme mystical experience. The fact that Watt is Arsene's physical opposite--that he is a "big bony shabby seedy haggard knock-kneed

[man]," where Arsene is a "little fat shabby seedy juicy or oily bandy-legged" individual (W, p. 57)--suggests, too, that Watt will perhaps be an introvertive mystic where Arsene is an extrovertive one.

In Part II the narrator implies that Mr. Knott is a God figure when he says that for Watt, "Mr. Knott was harbour, Mr. Knott was haven" (W, p. 133), and when he remarks on the lack of reaction from Mr. Knott when Watt fails to do one of his duties. "No punishment fell on [him]," the narrator says, "no thunderbolt . . . [and] this was a great source of wonder, to Watt" (W, p. 113), who is puzzled at being allowed to "transgress" (W, p. 114) with impunity. For the dedicated mystic, few things are as rewarding as coming to know God better, the ultimate reward being the beatific vision; Watt, comments the narrator, "wished to see Mr. Knott face to face," yet "he feared to do so" (W, p. 145). By the end of his time on the ground floor, however, Watt simply feels "tired . . . out":

What had he learnt? Nothing.
 What did he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing.
 Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to understand,
 of his anxiety to get well, what remained? Nothing.
 But was not that something?
 He saw himself then, so little, so poor. And now,
 littler, poorer. Was not that something?
 So sick, so alone.
 And now.
 Sicker, aloner.
 Was not that something? (W, p. 147)

Here the narrator suggests that Watt has come to Mr. Knott's house not for purposes of coming closer to God, but instead--and this is consistent with what we learn of Watt's activities in Part II--to recover from some sort of mental illness. Moreover, the expectation Arsene has raised in Part I to the effect that Watt will pursue a mystical quest is unfulfilled in the second part of the novel. In

Part II Watt is concerned with a series of perceptual problems rather than with finding God; the reader who accepts too readily the idea that Watt will behave in the same way as Arsene and Mr. Knott's other servants is once again guilty of being a "gentle skimmer."

The attentive reader of Part I will have noted, however, that Arsene does issue a warning. "[D]o not imagine me to suggest," he says to Watt, "that what has happened to me, what is happening to me, will ever happen to you, or that what is happening to you, what will happen to you, has ever happened to me, or rather, if it will, if it has, that there is any great chance of its being admitted" (W, pp. 43-44). And he adds just before the end of his speech to Watt that the information with which he has provided him is probably "quite useless" (W, p. 61). Sam suggests in Part III that during his period of service on the first floor of Mr. Knott's house, Watt came to regard Mr. Knott as a Christ figure, and sought to attain to the experience of Nothing.²⁸ But Sam is the inmate of a lunatic asylum, and is therefore a less than reliable commentator on Watt's activities. In any case, we gain very little detailed information from Sam about Watt's time on the first floor: too much of Sam's narrative is taken up with the story of the would-be confidence trickster Louit, a story that tells us nothing about Watt but is of value as a warning that not everything in the novel is as it might first appear to be. In Part II we discover that while on the ground floor Watt's devotion to Mr. Knott is imperfect, and that, rather than being a dedicated ascetic, indifferent to the world, Watt is greatly preoccupied with the problems involved in coming to know it better.

The perceptual problems he faces in Part II serve to illustrate why not only Watt but humanity more generally has difficulty forming an accurate picture of the world at large, and why even the attentive reader experiences difficulties with the "little world" (W, p. 81) of the novel. One such problem has to do with the relationship between perception and language. Shortly after arriving at Mr. Knott's, Watt finds himself

in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance. . . . Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, . . . it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. . . . It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. (W, p. 78)

Watt's difficulty in establishing a satisfactory relationship between words and objects is paralleled in the work of Fritz Mauthner, whose Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache (1901) Beckett is known to have read during the early thirties.²⁹ According to Mauthner, language arises from our sensory experience of the world around us: we use language to name the things we perceive. Our perceptions, however, are unsatisfactorily limited, for "the infinity of occurrences in reality . . . can reach us only through the few small gates of our [senses] and . . . everything which has no route to these gates must remain outside . . ."³⁰ Language is a reflection of our incomplete view of the world: the words we use refer not to the infinite complexity of the world at large but to our imperfect perception of it. Nor is language of any use in describing the complexities of the mind, for all words have their origin in

perception and are therefore inappropriate to describe our inner world, which is not open to perceptual investigation.³¹

Mauthner believed that philosophy ought to concern itself with the limitations of language, though he recognised the absurdity of using language for this purpose. "Nothing," he says in the Beiträge,

appeared more foolish than [attempting to speak] endlessly--with words which can never have a firm content--of nothing but of one's own ignorance. [Yet I was cheered on by] the spurring feeling: yes, it is the last attempt, it is the last work, and, because it cannot be the solution to the riddle of the sphinx, it is at least the redeeming deed which forces the sphinx to remain, since it destroys the sphinx.³²

Elsewhere he says "I must destroy language within me, in front of me, and behind me step for step if I want to ascend in the critique of language, which is the most pressing task for thinking man; I must shatter each rung of the ladder by stepping upon it. He who wishes to follow me must reconstitute the rungs in order to shatter them once again."³³

The fact that Watt has a "Davus complex ([a] morbid dread of sphin[x]es)," and that Arsene speaks of "existence off the ladder" (W, pp. 252, 42) has suggested to some critics that Watt is a largely Mauthnerian novel. Jennie Skerl, for example, argues that Mauthner's devotion to the analysis of language finds a counterpart in Watt's attempt "to get out of the trap of language by inventing his own personal verbal system to refer to his experience, or by attempting to imitate meaninglessness with a language that is meaningless."³⁴ But this is to overlook the fact that most of Watt's problems have less to do with language than with perception.

His problem, for example, with the Galls is not a linguistic one. Their arrival to tune the piano is a typical incident "of note"

(W, p. 69) not in the sense that Watt dwells on what the two piano tuners say to each other, but in the sense that their visit soon loses all meaning for Watt, "even the most literal" (W, p. 69). The scene involving the two Galls refuses to remain in his memory as a stable perception; instead it becomes for him an "example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment" (W, p. 70). In other words, Watt suffers from a peculiar form of perceptual regress: having organised the "big blooming buzzing confusion" of sense data into an intelligible figure-ground relationship, his mind has a tendency to allow that relationship to revert to its original state of sensory confusion. His mind behaves in this way in dealing with some, but not all, of the "incidents of note" that take place during his stay at Mr. Knott's house;³⁵ other incidents remain perceptually stable. The narrator comments that

[Watt] could recall . . . as ordinary occasions, the time when his dead father appeared to him in a wood, with his trousers rolled up over his knees and his shoes and socks in his hand; or the time when in his surprise at hearing a voice urging him, in terms of unusual coarseness, to do away with himself, he narrowly escaped being knocked down, by a dray; or the time when alone in a rowing-boat, far from land, he suddenly smelt flowering currant; or the time when an old lady of delicate upbringing, and advantageous person, for she was amputated well above the knee, whom he had pursued with his assiduities on no fewer than three distinct occasions, unstrapped her wooden leg, and laid aside her crutch. (W, p. 70)

Two of these incidents--the dead father's appearance in the wood and the experience of smelling flowering currant far from land--are clearly hallucinations. The voice urging him to do away with himself, by contrast, may well have been that of the driver of the dray intruding on Watt's self-absorption; while the case of the old lady may be either be real or imagined. Watt's failure to

distinguish clearly between what he perceives and what he imagines gives rise at times to needless perplexity. Thus he expends a great deal of time and energy wondering about the bell he hears ringing in Erskine's room at night, only to discover in the end that the bell is broken, and that he has been deluded in thinking that he has heard it. Nevertheless, like the four incidents cited above, the episode with the bell has the virtue of being perceptually stable: it does not revert to an undifferentiated welter of sense data.

Watt finds that he is unable to accept the perceptual plasticity of incidents like the one with the Galls. Instead, comments the narrator, he feels obliged "to enquire into what [such incidents] meant, oh not into what they really meant, . . . but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity" (W, p. 72). He feels no uneasiness about "foisting a meaning there where no meaning appeared" (W, p. 74): the important thing is not to account correctly for any given incident, but rather to explain the incident away. "For to explain," we are told, "had always been to exorcize, for Watt" (W, pp. 75-75).

Watt finds that he is unable to skim over certain aspects of life in the service of Mr. Knott. Though undisturbed by the eccentricity of his master's diet, he cannot help but wonder who was originally responsible for the arrangement by which various foods and drinks are mixed together each Saturday and the resulting "mess, or poss" (W, p. 84) consumed by Mr. Knott throughout the week. Twelve "possibilities" (W, pp. 86-87) occur to Watt in this connection. Of these, only four are possible; seven are impossible, and one improbable.³⁶

As numerous critics have observed, Watt's list of "possibilities" is a ludicrous parody of Descartes, who in his Discourse on Method resolves "to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I should be certain of having omitted nothing."³⁷ Watt's problem is that he is unable to make conceptual figure-ground distinctions: he is unable to see that some options are logically possible and therefore worthy of consideration, while others are improbable or simply self-contradictory. The narrator comments that "Other possibilities occurred to Watt, . . . but he put them aside, and quite out of his mind, as unworthy of serious consideration, for the time being" (W, p.87). On what basis he decides which possibilities are "unworthy" is never made clear; nor are we told exactly what these possibilities are.

Watt's preoccupation with permutations and combinations may derive from Descartes, who found in mathematics, a non-empirical discipline, a sense of certainty and exactness absent from empirical studies.³⁸ In contrast to the French philosopher, however, Watt does not seek to discover incontrovertible truths by way of mathematical speculation. He does not for a moment suppose that his thoughts about the arrangements over Mr. Knott's food have yielded "the least useful information concerning himself, or Mr. Knott." Instead, says the narrator of Part II, the chief virtue of these thoughts is that they allow him to turn "a disturbance into words, [to make] a pillow of old words, for his head" (W, p. 115).

Watt's tendency to invest his experiences with spurious meaning parallels the "gentle skimmer's" tendency to formulate oversimplified interpretations of the novel. Beckett's choice of the name "Knott" sits comfortably with the attentive reader so long as it is taken only to indicate that Watt's master is an enigmatic character—one who poses "knotty" interpretive problems. Difficulties arise when the name is associated with "naught" or "not."

When the narrator of Part II comments that "the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time" (W, p. 74), he is hinting that Mr. Knott is a deity figure. Other such hints are Sam's comment in Part III that it would be "anthropomorphic insolence" (W, p. 202) to inquire too closely into Mr. Knott's activities, and Arsene's observation, noted earlier, that Mr. Knott inspires "tireless love" (W, p. 61) in his servants. Yet this same Mr. Knott has a number of distinctly human characteristics. He is an eccentric who makes a habit of wearing his nightclothes over his dayclothes when he goes to bed; he has a human appetite for food, though his diet is odd; and as the noise Watt hears him make in the garden—"PLOPF PLOPF Plofp Plopf plopf plopf plopf plopf" (W, p. 146)—suggests, he not only eats but excretes. In Part II the narrator comments that Mr. Knott's appearance seems to Watt to change "from one glance to the next" (W, p. 146), and in Part III, Sam says that "one day Mr. Knott would be tall, fat, pale and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middle-sized, yellow and ginger . . . [etc.]" (W, p. 209). Clearly Mr. Knott cannot be all of these things: his changing appearance is surely a

function of Watt's perceptual difficulties, and his God-like qualities a projection of the minds of those characters and/or narrators who would like to think of him as a deity figure. To take too simple a view of Mr. Knott is to be a "gentle skimmer" once again.

Similar problems are posed to the reader by Beckett's choice of the name "Watt." It is easy enough to accept that the novel's main character may be named after the experimental psychologist H.J. Watt, for, like him, Beckett's Watt is given to formulating hypotheses about perception. Similarly, Watt's tendency to invent solutions to problems suggests that it may have been the Scottish inventor, James Watt, who inspired Beckett's choice of name.³⁹ Interpretive problems arise, however, when Watt's name is linked to the word "what," for then it appears that the novel may be an allegory of "what" and "not." Arsene's comment to Watt in Part I that "Erskine will go by your side, to be your guide" (W, p. 62) adds weight to this possibility, for it echoes the medieval morality play Everyman, in which Knowledge says, "Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide/ In thy most need to go by thy side."⁴⁰ In light of this allusion, Watt might appear to be the story of a modern Everyman whose journey to Mr. Knott's house is a journey in the direction either of death (assuming that the Knott/not association refers to the negation of life) or of the mystic's figurative death of the self (assuming that Knott is associated with naught--that is, with the Schopenhauerian concept of Nothing.) The Everyman parallel comes to an end, however, in Part II, when the narrator tells us that Watt soon found that "from Erskine no information was to be obtained" (W, p. 77). Erskine is simply not the guide Arsene predicted he would

be; nor does Watt end with either the actual or figurative death of its main character.

In any case, the reader who favours an allegorical reading of Watt must somehow account for its closing words, "no symbols where none intended" (W, p. 255). He may dismiss them as a joking invitation to the reader to commit the intentional fallacy; but if he takes them seriously, he is immediately faced with the problem of how it is possible to form a clear idea about Beckett's intentions in Watt, given that Beckett has never made any significant public comment about them. Internal evidence of his intentions is difficult to establish, for each of Watt's four parts has a separate narrator, each differing from the others in terms of what he knows and how sane he is. And even if the various narrators' overt intentions could be satisfactorily defined, the question of unacknowledged, unconscious intentions would remain. The critic who insists on an allegorical reading of Watt, and who at the same time accepts that there are "no symbols where none intended," will ultimately be obliged to admit that the two concepts are incompatible with each other. If he does not, there can be no doubt that he is a "gentle skimmer."

The gentle skimmer's desire to explain Watt's complexities away has a counterpart in Schopenhauer's concept of "metaphysical need," the need that impels perfectly sane men to search for metaphysical certainty.⁴¹ To the individual genuinely anxious to discover metaphysical truths, the world presents itself as a "remarkable, problematical, and indeed as an unfathomable and ever-disquieting riddle" (WWI, II, 373). But to the individual whose need for certainty exceeds his need for truth--to someone who is content to accept the explanations offered by religion, even though these may be

philosophically dubious or even untenable--the world appears in a much simpler guise.⁴² Schopenhauer comments cynically that religions are intended for "the innumerable multitude who, since they are incapable of examination and thought, would never comprehend the profoundest and most difficult truths . . ." (WWI, II, 367): such people allow their priests to foist onto them the idea that religious dogma provides the only correct answers to metaphysical questions.

6

Only a "gentle skimmer" could believe that Watt takes a dogmatic stance on the existence and benevolence of God. Though, as we have seen, Watt makes a "providential escape" from serious injury on his way to Mr. Knott's house when the stone that Lady McCann throws hits his hat rather than his head, it is not, the narrator comments, a matter of "mere mischance" that he is struck by it, for "God . . . guided [Lady McCann's] hand" (W, p. 30). If there is a God, Beckett is suggesting, He is inexplicably cruel to His creatures.

Beckett develops this idea at greater length in Part IV of the novel, where Watt has an experience reminiscent of the one in which Descartes believed he had been visited by Providence and instructed as to how he ought to proceed with his philosophical investigations. After leaving Mr. Knott's house, Watt stands on the roadway awaiting the approach of a figure who from a distance seems to resemble him; however, as he watches, the figure draws no nearer, and he ultimately realises that it is no more than an "hallucination" (W, p. 227).

This incident recalls part of a now-famous dream Descartes had on the night of 10 November 1619. In it, Descartes found himself

walking the streets of a town; suddenly he realised that he had passed a man of his acquaintance without greeting him, but when he tried to go back to make amends, was prevented from doing so by a strong wind, which threw him against a wall.⁴³ Georges Poulet has argued convincingly that the man Descartes passed in the dream is an aspect of himself: he has become two people because in waking life he was divided between faith in God on the one hand and doubt on the other.⁴⁴ When the dream came to an end, Descartes' faith was, however, reaffirmed: "God had shown him his mission, that of revealing [through a new scientific philosophy] the unity of all truth . . ."⁴⁵

By contrast, Watt is denied divine revelation: he leaves Mr. Knott's house knowing no more than when he first arrived and suffering still from the perceptual difficulties that afflicted him while in Mr. Knott's service. He is still subject to hallucinations, and is making curious perceptual reversals, mistaking the nearer end of the railway line for the farther and misinterpreting a request for one shilling and threepence as a request for three and one.⁴⁶ Moreover, it is clear that he has come no closer to God, and no nearer to understanding God's will.

Earlier in the novel, the existence of God is drawn into question. Arsene comments fatalistically that "if I could begin . . . all over again, knowing what I know now, the result would be the same" (W, p. 46). It would be the same, he implies, because events are being guided by some external agency--which may or may not be God. The narrator of Part II gives us to understand that the world is not, as Leibniz would have it, a "pre-established harmony,"⁴⁷ but is instead a "pre-established arbitrary" (W, p. 132),

a place where God has ordained that events should occur without rhyme or reason. Though Sam insists in Part III that he and Watt are drawn to each other by a mysterious "call" (W, p. 199), a call made all the more religious in significance by his comparison of himself to the Biblical Samuel,⁴⁸ it is clear that Sam is a troubled believer. The problem that weighs most heavily with him is the age-old problem of evil--of how a benevolent God can allow His creatures to suffer. This is clear from the episode in which he and Watt feed some young rats to some older ones, and agree that the experience brings them "nearest to God" (W, p. 153). In light of this passage, it is not surprising to find Sam modifying the notion of being guided by a "call" from God to the idea of being impelled "by some external agency" (W, p. 155) and finally to speaking of men being subject to "chance . . . or some other agency" (W, p. 196).

The problem of evil features importantly in the final part of the novel. In its closing pages we observe Watt leaving Mr. Knott's house no wiser or happier than when he arrived, being denied Descartes' Providential revelation on the way to the railway station, collapsing while waiting for the train, and being revived by some railway employees who pour a bucket of slops over him and cut him with the bucket in the process. How a benevolent God can allow all this to happen is of no interest to the employees, who by the time Watt rises to buy his ticket, have turned their attention to the beauties of the early morning countryside.

The sun was now well above the visible horizon. Mr. Gorman, Mr. Case and Mr. Nolan turned their faces towards it, as men will, in the early morning . . . The long summer's day had made an excellent start. If it continued in the same manner, its close would be worth coming to see.

All the same, said Mr. Gorman, life isn't such a bad old bugger. He raised high his hands and spread them out, in a

gesture of worship. He then replaced them in the pockets, of his trousers. When all is said and done, he said. . . .

And they say there is no God, said Mr. Case.

All three laughed heartily at this extravagance. (W, p. 245)

It is tempting to conclude from this that in Watt Beckett seeks to expose the folly of believing in God, given the obviousness of His failure to provide for the comfort and well-being of His creatures. The reader who does come to this conclusion is, however, a "gentle skimmer," for embodied in the above passage is an implicit version of the age-old argument from design--the argument that the beauties of nature would not exist if there had not been a supreme being to create them. Beckett leaves us here, as in so many of his other novels and plays, not with a firm statement about God's existence, but instead with a choice of possibilities. One possibility is that God exists, and is responsible for nature's beauty, but is either indifferent to the sufferings of His creatures or takes perverse delight in them; another is that there is no God, so that human suffering is a matter of either fate or chance. Beckett does not say which of these is the correct possibility: rather, he leaves us, as readers, to puzzle over the matter for ourselves.

It is entirely appropriate that Beckett should end the main body of the novel in this way. Here, at a gap in the narrative circle that is Watt, pondering the existence of God, we are reminded of the many problems that contribute to the limits of human knowledge. The problems are largely perceptual, having to do with the mind's tendency to simplify in order to render experience of the world at large intelligible. But what is intelligible is not necessarily what is true: in Watt as in other works, Beckett emphasises that an

absolutely accurate picture of the world is impossible to form; absolute knowledge will always lie beyond human reach.

Watt is one of Beckett's finest novels. Though it draws on the work of various philosophers and experimental psychologists, it is nonetheless an original work, an elaborate puzzle that bears testimony to the impossibility of making sense of an infinitely complex world. In Watt Beckett developed a highly sophisticated literary form to embody his views on the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge: his decision, after Watt, to write in French as well as English, was in the interests of refining his approach to form still further.

NOTES

¹See J.M Coetzee, "The Manuscript Revisions of Beckett's Watt," Journal of Modern Literature, 2 (Nov. 1972), 472-80, and Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), pp. 348 and 432-33.

²See Hugh Culik, "The Place of Watt in Beckett's Development," Modern Fiction Studies, 29 (Spring 1983), 63. Numerous other critics have suggested that Watt is named partly after the Scottish inventor, James Watt (1736-1819) and partly after the leader of the Peasants' Revolt, Wat Tyler (died 1381). Watt may be linked with James Watt, as we shall see, on the grounds that the former invents solutions to perceptual problems. Though Watt is linked with Wat Tyler by Arsene in Part I of the novel (see W, p. 46), it is difficult to see what the two have in common (unless Beckett is suggesting jokingly that both men are revolting, a possibility that cannot be overlooked in a novel where the arrival of two piano tuners is an incident "of note" (W, p. 69)).

³Ibid.

⁴The Gestalt principle arising from these experiments is the Principle of Prägnanz, mentioned in Chapter Four. It is that "experienced perceptual wholes tend toward the greatest regularity, simplicity, and clarity possible under the given conditions." (Solomon E. Asch, "Gestalt Theory," in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. David Sills (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968), VI, 168).

⁵George W. Hartmann, Gestalt Psychology (New York: Ronald Press, 1935), p. 184.

⁶All quotations from Watt are from the Calder & Boyars edition (London, 1970); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by W.

⁷In the last chapter we noted that early this century the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin discovered through experimentation that we make sense of the "big blooming buzzing confusion" of sense data (Mu, p. 7) by assigning greater prominence to some of the data, which we form into a perceptual whole known as "figure"; and lesser importance to the rest, which we resolve into a secondary configuration, "ground." (See Hartmann, pp. 23-24).

⁸Hartmann, p. 27. Hartmann italicises this quotation; I have removed the italics as unnecessary in this context.

⁹For a fuller discussion of Beckett's interest in the theory of relativity and its influence on his work, see Brother I. Pius Duggan, F.S.C., "Relativity, Quantum Theory and the Novels of Samuel Beckett," Diss. Loyola University, 1971.

¹⁰In both the Calder & Boyars and Grove Press (New York, 1959) editions of Watt (pp. 33 and 35, respectively) the first line of the second verse of the threne reads "Fifty-one point one." However, in The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana/Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 170, n2, Rubin Rabinovitz points out that this is a misprint for "Fifty-two point one."

¹¹Mathew Winston, "Watt's First Footnote," Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (February 1977), 76.

¹²The statement in Part II that "Watt's sense of chronology was strong, in a way, and his dislike of battology was very strong" (W, p. 163) does not necessarily mean that Watt told his story in the correct chronological order. What the phrase "in a way" suggests is that Watt had an eccentric, perhaps inverted, sense of chronology. Moreover, his dislike of "battology" (needless and tiresome repetition in speaking or writing) is contradicted, as Winston, p. 75, has shown, by the extraordinary detail into which Watt is reported to have gone at various points in the novel.

¹³In A Glossary for the Study of English (New York: Oxford U.P., 1971), p. 57, Lee T. Lemon states that "A heroic quatrain consists of four lines of iambic pentameter, usually rhyming a-b-a-b." With this in mind, we might expect to find that the first and third parts of Watt's story have something in common, and also the second and fourth parts. However, since we are unable to establish which the first, second, third and fourth parts of his story are, we are prevented from discovering what they do have in common. The problem is further complicated by the fact that heroic quatrains are, according to Lemon, only "usually" rhymed a-b-a-b, where, as we have seen, the narrator says: "Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story. Heroic quatrains are not otherwise elaborated" (W, p. 214).

¹⁴Winston, 72-73.

¹⁵In Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1973), p. 44, Ruby Cohn notes that Boswell used the term "mansion" in this way. See also Mu, p. 116, where Beckett says that in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat there were "no open wards in the ordinary sense, but single rooms, . . . or as Boswell said, mansions, opening south off the nave and east and west off the transepts."

¹⁶Culik, 67.

¹⁷Sam hints at this in Part III when he says that when facing Watt, "I felt as though I were standing before a great mirror" (W, p. 157).

¹⁸Hartmann, Gestalt Psychology, p. 26.

¹⁹In the novel, this passage and the other just quoted appear in italics. I have removed the italics as unnecessary in this context. My translations of these passages differ slightly from Ruby Cohn's in

Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 310.

²⁰Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 34.

²¹In The Shape of Chaos: an Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 62, David Hesla draws this parallel in detail.

²²For further information about mystics hearing inner voices, see Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. 275-76.

²³See also W, p. 80, where we are told that "Watt had a great experience of clouds, and could distinguish the various sorts, the cirrus, the stratus, the tumulus and the various other sorts, at a glance." Here "tumulus" takes the place of the correct "cumulus." Again, as Mathew Winston has shown ("Watt's First Footnote," 69, n. 1), there is a missing word in the last sentence of the first paragraph of Watt, which most readers fill in without noticing. Time and again Beckett reminds us in subtle little ways that we are guilty of being inattentive readers.

²⁴Ronald W. Hepburn, "Mysticism, Nature and Assessment of," in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), V, 429, says that:

An important distinction can be made between the extrovertive (outward-looking) and introvertive (inward-looking) types of mystical experience. In the first of these, the subject looks out upon the multiplicity of objects in the world and sees them transfigured into a living, numinous unity, their distinctness somehow obliterated. In nature mysticism, a form of extrovertive experience, the items of nature are not lost to consciousness; rather they are seen with unusual vividness . . . In the introvertive type, the mystic becomes progressively less aware of his environment and of himself as a separate individual.

²⁵Hence Arsene's comment that "The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison . . . are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the old whores, that's the nearest we'll ever get to felicity . . ." (W, p. 43). Cf. WWI, 214-15, where Schopenhauer says that "human endeavours and desires . . . always delude us by presenting their satisfaction as the final end of will. As soon as we attain to them they no longer appear the same, and therefore they soon grow stale, are forgotten, and though not openly disowned, are yet always thrown aside as vanished illusions. . . . [E]very particular act of will has its end, the whole will has none. . . ."

²⁶The Heavenly Ladder by St. John Climacus (579-649 A.D.) is perhaps the best known of the many books in which the ladder metaphor is used to describe the various stages of the ascetic life. (See G.

Downey, "John Climacus, St.," in The New Catholic Encyclopedia (London: McGraw-Hill, 1967), VII, 1045). David Hesla, op. cit., p. 64, lists a number of writers in addition to Climacus in whose work the ladder metaphor appears; he also suggests, p. 63, that Arsene is named after Arsenius, a fifth century A.D. ascetic and saint.

²⁷See "Appendix 1: The Ladder Joke in Watt."

²⁸The idea that Watt spends his time on the first floor in pursuit of Nothing is, as we have seen, suggested by the inverted speeches that Sam presents us with in Part III. In "Mock Evangelism in Beckett's Watt," Modern Language Studies, 2 (1972), 74-75, Richard Law argues persuasively that Sam's description of Watt in Part III as a "witness" (W, p. 202) to Mr. Knott is meant to recall such Biblical passages as Acts 1.7-8 and John 5.31, where Christ tells his disciples that they are to act as witnesses to his divinity. Though Law does not mention it, Mr. Knott's need to be witnessed has its source in John 5.31, where Christ says, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true."

²⁹In James Joyce (London: Oxford U.P., 1966), p. 661, Joyce's biographer Richard Ellman reveals that in the early thirties Beckett read passages from Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache to Joyce, who was interested in the theory of language it contained. Beckett's interest in Mauthner has been discussed by Philip Howard Solomon in "A Ladder Image in Watt: Samuel Beckett and Fritz Mauthner," Papers on Language and Literature, 7 (Fall 1971), 422-27; by Jennie Skerl in "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language' in Samuel Beckett's Watt," Contemporary Literature, 15 (Autumn 1974), 474-87; by Linda Ben-Zvi in "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," PMLA, 95 (March 1980), 183-200; and by Rubin Rabinovitz in The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), pp. 144-45.

³⁰Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache (Leipzig, 1923), I, 35, trans. Gershon Weiler, in Mauthner's Critique of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1970), p. 60.

³¹See Beiträge, I, 235-36: "Since our sense-organs cannot be turned towards the inside, since we have no sense-organs for our 'mind', there will never be a science of the mind, and it is for this reason that psychology strives to be physiological. . . . There is not a single word in language, which did not originate in observations of the outside world, including one's own body and its experiences." (Trans. Gershon Weiler, op. cit., p. 12).

³²Beiträge, III, 634-35, trans. Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," PMLA, 95 (March 1980), 197.

³³Beiträge, I, 1-2. Quoted in ibid., 187.

³⁴Skerl, 480.

³⁵See W, p. 77. See also W, p. 71, where the narrator comments that "outside Mr. Knott's house, and of course grounds, such incidents [as the incident of the Galls] were unknown, or so Watt supposed."

³⁶The four logically possible options are numbers 1, 2, 8 and 9 (W, pp. 86-87). The logically impossible (i.e., self-contradictory) options are 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12. Number 7 is improbable, for unless Mr. Knott has amnesia (and there is no evidence in the novel to suggest this), it is unlikely that he would be responsible for the arrangement, yet unaware who was responsible.

³⁷René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences" (1637); rpt. in Descartes Selections, ed. Ralph Eaton (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1955), p. 17.

³⁸Another possibility is that Watt's interest in mathematics derives from Robert Burton, whose The Anatomy of Melancholy Beckett alludes to in various novels and plays. According to Burton, mathematics is one of the best cures for melancholy: calculating or perusing "Napier's Logarithms, or those tables of artificial Sines and Tangents, . . . or those elaborate conclusions of . . . Sector, Quadrant and Cross-staff" is, he says, an excellent means of soothing the troubled mind. (See The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (1621; New York: Tudor, 1948), p. 462). Elsewhere in this work, Burton says that "Milk, and all that comes of milk, as butter and cheese, curds, &c. increase melancholy . . ." (p. 191); this is of interest in relation to Mr. Nixon's statement that Watt drinks "nothing but milk" (W, p. 21). An "inordinate diet" can give rise to melancholy, says Burton (pp. 186-87); in Part IV of the novel, a disembodied voice tells Watt: "The only cure is diet" (W, p. 225). "[T]oo much solitariness" (Burton, p. 213) is another cause of melancholy: Arsene says that like Watt, Vincent and Walter had "big red noses, the result of too much solitude" (W, p. 57). Watt weeps "tears of mental fatigue" (W, p. 85) as he prepares Mr. Knott's food, tears that seem to be shed not only on his own behalf, but on behalf of all mankind. The threne he listens to in Part I dwells on the coming and going of successive generations of man, and implicitly poses the question, "What significance has the life of the individual in the context of eternity?" It may well be that the mathematical calculations that go with the song are Watt's way of cushioning himself against the melancholy conclusion that the answer is "None." Elsewhere, his speculations on how excess food is to be given to the dog move abruptly from the supposition that there may exist in the neighbourhood a "family of say the two parents and from ten to fifteen children and grandchildren" (W, p. 97) who keep a dog, to the bald statement that "The name of this fortunate family was Lynch" (W, p. 98). Suddenly hypothetical no longer, the family burgeons in Watt's mind into a total of twenty-eight people, comprising five generations. The family's goal--the goal that will give meaning to all their lives--is to reach a point where the total age of all its members is a thousand years. The calculations Watt makes in connection with the Lynches' ages are again a source of psychological comfort.

Beckett alludes to Burton not only in Watt, but in various other works as well. See, for example, the opening stage directions to Krapp's Last Tape, in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 55, where Krapp is described as "a wearish old man." This is a direct echo of Burton's description of the pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus in The Anatomy of Melancholy, p. 12: "Democritus . . . was a little wearish old man, very melancholy by nature, averse from company in his latter days, and much given to solitariness . . ." Yet, in spite of this tendency, Democritus was known as the laughing philosopher, as Burton goes on to tell us: "Heraclitus the Philosopher, out of a serious meditation on men's lives, fell a weeping, and with continual tears bewailed their misery, madness, and folly. Democritus on the other side burst out laughing, their whole life seemed to him so ridiculous . . ." (p. 38). References to Democritus' laughter abound in Beckett's novels. As we shall see in Chapter 10, Happy Days, with its curious use of the term "emmet" for ant, derives partly from a passage in The Anatomy of Melancholy beginning, "Our villages are like mole-hills, and men as so many emmets, busy, busy still, going to and fro, in and out, and crossing one another's projects" (pp. 237-38).

³⁹Rabinovitz, p. 136, suggests that Watt's name derives from the French "wattman" ("tramdriver"). Watt, he suggests, is as restricted in outlook as a tram is in movement: that is, Watt's mind appears to run along figurative tramrails.

⁴⁰Everyman, in Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays, ed. A.C. Cawley (London: Dent, 1965), p. 222.

⁴¹Rabinovitz, p. 133, draws attention to Schopenhauer's concept of metaphysical need in connection with Watt.

⁴²See WWI, II, 365. That God exists, that He has granted free will to humanity, that He rewards those who correctly exercise their freedom with an eternity of bliss in Heaven and punishes those who do not with the eternal torments of Hell, are, Schopenhauer emphasises, matters of belief rather than of demonstrable truth.

⁴³See J.R. Vrooman, René Descartes: a Biography (New York: Putnam, 1970), p. 56.

⁴⁴Georges Poulet, Studies in Human Time, trans. Elliot Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1956), p. 60.

⁴⁵Vrooman, p. 60.

⁴⁶In "Watt, Knott and Beckett's Bilingualism," Journal of Beckett Studies, 10 (1985), 55, Ann Beer asks: ". . . if Watt only began to reverse his language when about to embark on the second half of his narrative, as Sam claims, why is he reported to have said 'Ruse a by' [W, p. 126] in his story of getting in to see the picture in Erskine's room, which ought to have occurred while he spoke normally?" Beer goes on to point out that in the manuscript this phrase appears as "By a ruse"; she fails, however, to see that the

inversion in the final text is another small trap for the "gentle skimmer."

⁴⁷For a discussion of this phrase, see L.E. Loemker, "Monad and Monadology," in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), V, 428.

⁴⁸See W, p. 161, where Sam speaks of having "anoointed [Watt's] face," recalling 1 Samuel 8.16, 10.1 and 16.13.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRANSITION TO FRENCH

1

At war's end, the editors of Cahiers d'Art asked Beckett to contribute an essay on the work of two painters he had known for some years, the brothers Geer and Bram van Velde. "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon" was the first of three essays on the van Veldes Beckett was to write between 1945 and 1949--two of them in French.¹ These essays were not, however, the first work he had done in the language. During the thirties Beckett had translated his novel Murphy into French with help from a friend, Alfred Péron, and had also written a series of poems, which were published for the first time in 1946.²

It was not until after the war that he began writing fiction in French. In late 1945, he began the first draft of a novel entitled Les Bosquets de Bondy, but soon put it to one side; in May of the following year, he used what he had written as the basis of a new novel, Mercier et Camier, which remained unpublished until 1970.³ Later in 1946 he wrote four Nouvelles: "La Fin," "L'Expulsé," "Le Calmant" and Premier Amour.⁴ Two of these he translated into English with the help of Richard Seaver; the others he translated by himself.⁵

Beckett has often been asked why he stopped writing fiction in English after the war and started writing in French. "Pour faire

remarquer moi," he told the Editors of transition in 1948; but this was a joke, a grammatical mistake designed to suggest that he was a less competent writer of French than he actually was.⁶ More revealing was his answer to Niklaus Gessner: "Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style."⁷ When taken with other, similar comments--the comment that "he was afraid of English 'because you couldn't help writing poetry in it,'"⁸ and that "French had the right 'weakening' effect,"⁹ for example--his remark to Gessner indicates that he turned to French as a means of expressing himself more simply. Probably he felt the need to do this for the sake of dissociating himself from James Joyce: rather than be seen as an imitator of Joyce, in the flamboyant English of Murphy and Watt, Beckett started writing in a foreign language, it would seem, for the sake of establishing himself as an author in his own right. Between 1945 and 1955, he wrote some of his finest fiction and drama in the language of his adopted country, France.¹⁰

Beckett has made a practice of translating his French works into English, sometimes with the help of others. Richard Seaver, who assisted Beckett in translating "La Fin" and "L'Expulsé," has commented that "'What we ended up with was not a translation but a complete redoing of the original. And yet, even though it was completely different, he was totally faithful to the French. It was a completely new creation.'"¹¹ Similarly, Patrick Bowles, who worked with Beckett on the English version of Molloy, later wrote that "'From the outset [Beckett] stressed that it shouldn't be merely "translated"; we should write a new book in the new language. For with the transposition of speech occurs a transposition of thought, and even at times, of action.'"¹² These remarks are important

because they suggest that there may be significant differences between the French and English versions of Beckett's works, as indeed there are. The serious student of Beckett cannot afford to read him in only one language.

Beckett's two French essays on the van Veldes reveal that his views on the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge in the mid-forties are much the same as in earlier essays. What he wants to emphasise in the first of them, "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon," is that although the van Velde brothers differ as painters, their work comes together "au coeur du dilemme, celui même des arts plastiques: Comment représenter le changement?" "Pour le peintre," says Beckett, "la chose est impossible. C'est d'ailleurs de la représentation de cette impossibilité que la peinture moderne a tiré une bonne partie de ses meilleurs effets" (*Dis*, p. 129). It is impossible either for Geer van Velde to represent in a static medium the changes continually occurring in the world around him, or for Abraham van Velde to represent the changes in the inner world of his mind. Yet the van Veldes make a virtue of necessity, for it is from the representation of this impossibility that they have drawn their best effects.

In the second essay, "Peintres de l'Empêchement," Beckett emphasises, as before, that Geer van Velde focuses on "[le] dehors, la lumière et le vide," while Abraham (whom he now refers to more familiarly as "Bram") is concerned with "[le] dedans, l'obscurité, le plein, la phosphorescence" (*Dis*, p. 136). Each painter is faced with an insurmountable obstacle: Geer van Velde says, in effect: "'Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le représenter, parce qu'il est ce qu'il est'"; and Bram van Velde: "'Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le

représenter, parce que je suis ce que je suis'" (Dis, p. 136). "Il y a toujours eu ces deux sortes d'artiste, ces deux sortes d'empêchement, l'empêchement-objet et l'empêchement-oeil," Beckett comments. "Mais ces empêchements, on en tenait compte. Il y avait accommodation. Ils ne faisaient pas partie de la représentation, ou à peine. Ici ils en font partie. On dirait la plus grande partie. Est peint ce qui empêche de peindre" (Dis, p. 136).

Towards the end of the essay, Beckett says that "La peinture des van Velde sort, libre de tout souci critique, d'une peinture de critique et de refus, refus d'accepter comme donné le vieux rapport sujet-objet. Il est évident que toute oeuvre d'art est un rajustement de ce rapport, mais sans en être une critique dans le sens où le meilleur de la peinture moderne en est une critique . . . " (Dis, p. 137). "Le vieux rapport sujet-objet" is the one Beckett describes in his 1934 essay, "Recent Irish Poetry." The worst poets, he says there, are the ones who do not recognise that there is a "space that intervenes between [the artist] and the world of objects" (Dis, p. 70).

As we saw at the beginning of Chapter Four, that "space" is Schopenhauerian in character: the forms of space, time and causality, which enable the individual to make sense of sense data in every act of perception, create an "irreducible boundary between object and subject" (WWI, I, 155). The individual perceives the world not as it really is, but instead as it is mediated to him by his senses. There is, says Schopenhauer, "a deep gulf between the ideal and the real" (WWI, II, 400)--between the perceived world of "idea" on the one hand and reality on the other. Reality must remain a mystery to us because to perceive is inevitably to simplify and

distort. Yet even the simplest of phenomena are highly complex:
 ". . . every rock-crystal, every iron-pyrite, by reason of its
 crystallographical, optical, chemical and electrical properties, is
 to the searching consideration and investigation an abyss of
 incomprehensibilities and mysteries" (WWI, II, 404).

Thus there is a Schopenhauerian basis for Beckett's view that
 the van Veldes refuse to accept the old idea that painters can
 adequately represent reality in their work. "L'empêchement-oeil" of
 which Beckett speaks in the essay is the obstacle posed by the forms
 of perception; "l'empêchement-objet" resides in the inherent
 complexity of phenomena. Not only do the van Veldes refuse to accept
 "le vieux rapport sujet-objet"; they make their refusal an essential
 feature of their art. Significantly, Beckett's concern with
 "l'empêchement-oeil" and "l'empêchement-objet" is an important
 feature of the art of his earliest French fiction--his novel Mercier
and Camier and his four Nouvelles, to which he assigned the English
 titles "First Love," "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and "The End."

2

The main character and first-person narrator of the Nouvelles is
 a nameless figure introduced to us in "First Love" as a young man of
 twenty-five, whose fortunes we follow to the point of his apparent
 suicide in "The End" an indeterminate number of years later.¹³ He is
 well-educated--he mentions his university tutor in two of the
Nouvelles and alludes to Wordsworth, Heraclitus and Dante in the
 other two¹⁴--and is all too aware that absolutely certain knowledge
 lies beyond human reach. In "First Love" he comments that:

I always fell into the same error, that of seeking to clear [things] up. It took me a long time . . . to realize that the colour of an eye half seen, or the source of some distant sound, are closer to Giudecca in the hell of unknowing than the existence of God, or the origins of protoplasm, or the existence of self, and even less worthy than these to occupy the wise. (CSP_r, p. 17)

The colour of an eye half seen, or the source of some distant sound, are close to Giudecca--in Dante the last of the four divisions of Circle IX of Hell, where traitors are punished¹⁵--in the sense that perception is less trustworthy than it may at first seem. It may seem that what we see or hear is more certain than our abstract speculations about the existence of God, the origins of protoplasm, or the existence of the self, but in fact our senses are unequal to the task of representing reality to us accurately. "L'empêchement-oeil" ensures that our perception of the world at large is, and always will be, a simplified and distorted image of the world as it really is: "reality" is not a word we can use to describe that image, as the narrator is aware.¹⁶ Moreover, a combination of "l'empêchement-oeil" and "l'empêchement-objet" will always prevent us from reaching absolutely certain conclusions about God and the self, since God and the self are imperceptible and thus forever shrouded in mystery. "[W]e may reason on to our heart's content," says the narrator in "The Expelled," "[but] the fog won't lift" (CSP_r, p. 25).

Shortly after the death of his father in "First Love," the narrator is evicted from his family home. As in "The Expelled" and "The End," where he is again expelled from the place in which he has been living, he must adjust to a new situation, and in doing so, revise his beliefs. One thing that remains constant throughout the Nouvelles, however, is the narrator's unwillingness to commit himself to belief in God. In "First Love" he locates God's existence

somewhere in the "hell of unknowing" (CSPr, p. 17); in "The Expelled" he speaks ironically of raising "[his] eyes to the sky, whence cometh our help" (CSPr, p. 24), adding in "The Calmative" that "it was always from the earth, rather than from the sky, notwithstanding its reputation, that my help came in time of trouble" (CSPr, p. 39).¹⁷ Elsewhere he speaks disparagingly of the traditional Christian belief in a "fatuous eternity" (CSPr, p. 36), and says that "it would vex me . . . to [take] refuge in a common church" (CSPr, p. 41).

Religion provides a "refuge" for man in the sense that it furnishes its adherents with a pre-established body of answers to otherwise unanswerable metaphysical questions. There is good reason to believe that the narrator of the Nouvelles (and Beckett himself) agree with Schopenhauer when he says that the metaphysical systems of the world's various religions are for "the great majority of men who are not capable of thinking, but only of believing, and who are not accessible to reasons, but only to authority" (WWI, II, 365). In 1961 Beckett commented bitterly to Tom Driver that "'When you pass a church on an Irish bus, all the hands flurry in the sign of the cross. One day the dogs of Ireland will do that too and perhaps also the pigs.'" ¹⁸ Similarly, the narrator of the Nouvelles draws attention to the passing of a funeral procession and the attendant "flurry of hats and . . . flutter of countless fingers," and says that he hopes he will never be "reduced to making the sign of the cross" (CSPr, pp. 26-27).

Yet, in spite of his lack of faith in God, the narrator of the Nouvelles lives a life of ascetic self-denial, in pursuit of the mystical experience of "Nothing." "What mattered to me in my

dispeopled kingdom," he says in "First Love," "was supineness in the mind, the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short" (CSPr, p. 6). While the ultimate obliviousness to the self and the world at large entailed in the experience of Nothing abolishes "actual knowledge, i.e., the world as idea [or] . . . self-knowledge of the will," Schopenhauer tells us, it nevertheless furnishes the individual with the kind of timeless, absolute knowledge that is "only attainable in one's own experience and cannot be further communicated" (WWI, I, 530). This is the knowledge the narrator seeks; as an imperfect ascetic, however, he will always be prevented from attaining it.

Because a certain "dulling of the world" is something the narrator experiences in all four Nouvelles, all four have a curiously dreamlike atmosphere. In "The Expelled" the narrator comments, indeed, that his everyday experience is "most dreamlike" (CSPr, p. 22), while in "The Calmative" he speaks of moving along "in a dream" (CSPr, p. 35), and asks rhetorically at one point: "Into what nightmare thingness am I fallen?" (CSPr, p. 42). Throughout the Nouvelles he describes the world about him in the vaguest of terms, hinting that the action takes place in either Ireland or France, but offering no very definite evidence as to which.¹⁹

The dreamlike quality of "First Love" suggests that its title may derive from a case Freud discusses in The Interpretations of Dreams. In the case in question, the subject is a physician who tells Freud that he dreamed of having a "'primary syphilitic affection'" on his left forefinger. "If one takes the trouble to make an analysis," Freud comments, "one learns that 'primary

affection' reduces itself to 'prima affectio' (first love), and that the repulsive sore, in the words of [the physician], proves to be 'the representative of wish-fulfilments charged with intense emotion.'"²⁰ In other words, the physician would like to experience his first love affair, but fears the consequences, both emotional and physical. Similarly, though in "First Love" the narrator finds that he has fallen in love with a woman he initially calls Lulu, then Anna,²¹ he is unhappy at the thought that she has lured him away from a life of ascetic self-denial. "What goes by the name of love," he says, "is banishment" (CSP, p. 6)---banishment from the life that might have led to the mystic's experience of "Nothing."

In spite of his wish to avoid worldly pleasure, the narrator finds himself (like Murphy and Belacqua before him) at the mercy of his sexual cravings. Though he would like to avoid becoming involved with Lulu/Anna, his body yearns for her, and it is in response to this yearning that he allows himself to suppress some of his misgivings about love. When he discovers that she is a prostitute, he is untroubled by the thought that she might infect him with some form of venereal disease. What bothers him is that involvement with her will oblige him to forego the life of introspective self-denial he has relished in the past. As soon as Lulu/Anna gives birth to a baby, the narrator leaves her, because the prospect of having to love both mother and child would make greater demands on his life than he is prepared to accept.

Prior to meeting Lulu/Anna, the narrator had, he tells us, "nothing to go by, having never loved before, but of course [I] had heard of the thing, at home, in school, in brothel and at church, and read romances . . . in six or seven languages, both dead and living,

in which it was handled at length" (CSPr, p. 9). He is embittered by his first experience of love, finding it an intrusive distraction from solitary self-communion. Aware that to be in love is the norm for most other people, he assumes that his readers are probably not in sympathy with him, and deliberately seeks to either shock or insult them. "Would I," he asks at one point, "have been tracing [Lulu/Anna's] name in old cowshit if my love had been pure and disinterested? And with my devil's finger into the bargain, which I then sucked. Come now!" (CSPr, p. 9). The impatient "Come now!" with which this passage ends finds an even more aggressive counterpart in another passage, where the narrator starts to explain why he behaved as he did, then breaks off abruptly with the comment that he had "other reasons [too,] better not wasted on cunts like you" (CSPr, p. 8).

The narrator remains embittered and aggressive in "The Expelled," and seeks to upset the comfortable bourgeois reader with the comment that "They never lynch children, babies, no matter what they do they are whitewashed in advance. I personally would lynch them with the utmost pleasure, I don't say I'd lend a hand, no, I am not a violent man, but I'd encourage the others and stand them drinks when it was done" (CSPr, p. 26). Children annoy the narrator largely because they mock him rather than show the respect that is due to a man who, in search of the mystic's experience of "Nothing," has devoted a lifetime to poverty and self-denial. His desire to lynch them is a desire for revenge, as is his sudden (unfulfilled) yearning in "The Expelled" to set fire to the stable in which a cab driver he has met keeps his horse and cab. Overall, the narrator would like to avenge himself on the sober members of a society in which he can play

no part--a society which seeks to exclude and even revile him. But although he is apparently unaware of it, harbouring such feelings disqualifies him from experiencing "Nothing," for, as we saw in Chapter Four, that experience is available only to the ascetic who learns to welcome "every injury, ignominy, and insult; he receives them gladly," says Schopenhauer, "as the opportunity of learning with certainty that he no longer asserts the will . . ." (WWI, I, 493).

In other respects, however, the narrator shows himself to be dedicated to self-denial. Though he is expelled from a comfortable home in three of the four Nouvelles, his exile from society is otherwise self-imposed. He rejects the love of Lulu/Anna in "First Love" and the friendship of a succession of anonymous figures in "The Expelled," "The Calmative" and "The End." Solitude, we are led to believe, is a necessity if he is to pursue the ascetic life satisfactorily. Yet solitude has its disadvantages. The narrator is aware, for example, that living away from people makes it difficult for him to communicate with them. In "The End," one of the officials at the "charitable institution" from which he is being expelled comments that "no one understands a tenth of what you say" (CSPR, p. 53), and the narrator admits to having a "strange accent" arising from his habit of "assimilating the vowels and omitting the consonants" (CSPR, p. 56). His inability to make himself understood limits his acquisition of ordinary, everyday knowledge of the world around him, just as his imperfect asceticism prevents him from acquiring the absolute knowledge that arises from the experience of "Nothing."

Another disadvantage to living in self-isolation is that, with the lack of a friend or lover to validate his memories, it becomes

increasingly difficult for the narrator to distinguish between what he has actually experienced and what he only thinks he has experienced. "I sometimes wonder," he says at one point "if [the sequence of events I have just related] is not all invention, if in reality things did not take quite a different course, one I had no choice but to forget" (CSPr, p. 7). According to Schopenhauer, the inability to distinguish clearly between memory and fiction is a sign of insanity:

For the most part, madmen do not err in the knowledge of what is immediately present; their raving always relates to what is absent and past, and only through these to their connection with what is present. Therefore it seems to me that their malady specially concerns the memory; not indeed that memory fails them entirely, for many of them know a great deal by heart, and sometimes recognise persons whom they have not seen for a long time; but rather that the thread of memory is broken, the continuity of its connection destroyed, and no uniformly connected recollection of the past is possible. Particular scenes of the past are known correctly, just like the particular present; but there are gaps in their recollection which they fill up with fictions . . . (WWI, I, 248-49)

There are other, more obvious signs that the narrator of the Nouvelles is mad. Not only does he approve of lynching babies and children, and have a recurrent desire to set fire to things, but, like the insane narrator of Tennyson's "Maud," a poem Beckett alludes to in Rough for Radio II, he believes for a time that he is dead.²² Tennyson says of his narrator that "[h]e is the heir of madness, an egotist with the makings of a cynic, raised to sanity by a pure and holy love [for Maud,] which elevates his whole nature."²³ The difference between Beckett's narrator and Tennyson's, of course, is that the former spurns the possibility of being "raised to sanity" by love; instead, he prefers to live in solitude, devoted to a life of introspective self-communion.

Because, in spite of the sacrifices he makes, the experience of "Nothing" continues to elude the narrator, he seeks to console himself in various ways. Writing fiction is one form of consolation: telling himself stories serves as a "calmative" in much the same way that hearing his father tell the story of "Joe Breem, or Breen" (CSPr, p. 37) served to calm him as a child. Another way of dulling the pain of his failure to attain to "Nothing" is to swallow a phial of sedative just before attempting to drown himself at the conclusion of "The End." If death is the ultimate calmative, it is because none of the consolations life has to offer is sufficient to compensate the narrator for his disappointment at having lived a life of self-denial in vain.

Of least value to him is any social or political solution to his problem. Near the end of the last Nouvelle, the narrator comes upon a speaker who is addressing a crowd about the plight of the poor:

He was bellowing so loud that snatches of his discourse reached my ears. Union . . . brothers . . . Marx . . . capital . . . bread and butter . . . love. . . . All of a sudden he turned and pointed at me, as at an exhibit. Look at this down and out, he vociferated, this leftover. If he doesn't go down on all fours, it's for fear of being impounded. Old, lousy, rotten, ripe for the muckheap. And there are a thousand like him, worse than him, ten thousand, twenty thousand--A voice, Thirty thousand. Every day you pass them by, resumed the orator, and when you have backed a winner you fling them a farthing. . . . It never enters your head . . . that your charity is a crime, an incentive to slavery, stultification and organized murder. . . . Do you hear me, you crucified bastard! cried the orator. Then I went away, although it was still light. . . . He must have been a religious fanatic, I could find no other explanation. Perhaps he was an escaped lunatic. He had a nice face, a little on the red side. (CSPr, pp. 65-66)

The narrator is so out of touch with conventional society that he fails to recognise that the speaker is a Marxist who is proposing that a greater good might be achieved by way of the redistribution of

wealth. But even if the narrator were aware of what the speaker is talking about, it is clear that he would not be in sympathy with it. He has deliberately chosen a life of self-denial for the sake of the spiritual reward it promises. He would probably agree with Schopenhauer that "Human cheerfulness or dejection are manifestly not determined by external circumstances, such as wealth and position, for we see at least as many glad faces among the poor as among the rich" (WWI, I, 408). For the narrator's dejection arises not from his material circumstances, but from his disappointment in the fruits of the ascetic life he has lived. To his dismay, he has found that the absolute knowledge implicit in the mystic's experience of "Nothing" lies frustratingly beyond his reach.

3

Mercier and Camier resembles the Nouvelles in that it, too, has a first-person narrator. "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will," he says in the opening sentence, "for I was with them all the time" (MC, p. 7).²⁴ The novel differs from the Nouvelles, however, in that the narrator never appears as a character: he is with Mercier and Camier in the same sense that Fielding is at all times with the characters in Joseph Andrews, though he never figures in the novel as a character himself.²⁵ Unlike the characters in Joseph Andrews, however, Mercier and Camier sense that they are being observed:

Strange impression, said Mercier, strange impression
sometimes that we are not alone. You not?
I am not sure I understand, said Camier. . . .

Like the presence of a third party, said Mercier.
Enveloping us. I have felt it from the start. And I am
anything but psychic. (MC, p. 100)

Mercier's sense of being "enveloped" by this mysterious third party suggests that it may possess superhuman powers. Brenda Walker has argued that the passage is meant to recall the story told in Luke 24, where two of three men journeying to Emmaus shortly after the Crucifixion discover that the third man is Jesus, risen from the dead.²⁶ That the narrator is Christ is also implicit in the title of Beckett's first draft of the novel, "Le Voyage de Mercier et Camier autour du Pot dans les Bosquets de Bondy," for as Ruby Cohn has observed,

'Tourner autour du pot' is colloquial French for 'to detour,' and the voyage of Mercier and Camier is a series of detours from their undesignated destination. The long title situates these detours in the grove of Bondy--in colloquial French a den of thieves. But though Bondy is mentioned only once in the novel--Watt refers to 'Bondy métropolitain'--the book focuses on two thieves, one of whom may be saved and the other damned.²⁷

Jesus was partly human and partly divine; similarly, the narrator is at times possessed of the limited knowledge of a conventional first-person narrator, and at other times of the much more extensive knowledge of a conventional omniscient narrator. Ultimately, this narrator creates a fictional world filled with uncertainties--a world that constantly reminds us of our inescapable uncertainties about the nature of world at large.

For the most part the narrator emphasises that his knowledge of the novel's characters and the world they inhabit is limited. At one point, for example, he reports that "Mercier raised his eyes, but their stare was not at Camier, nor even at the wall," adding, "What on earth could it have been that they fixed with such intensity? One

wonders" (MC, p. 82); elsewhere, he comments more generally that "Certain things shall never be known for sure" (MC, p. 10). Yet in Chapter Five he enters Mercier's mind and the mind of another character just as an omniscient narrator would:

His path crossed, at a given moment, that of an old man of weird and wretched aspect, carrying under his arm what looked like a board folded in two. It seemed to Mercier he had seen him somewhere before and he wondered as he went on his way where that somewhere could have been. The old man too, on whom for a wonder the transit of Mercier had not been lost, was left with the impression of a scarecrow encountered elsewhere and busied himself for a space with trying to recall in what circumstances. (MC, pp. 75-76)

What the narrator does not tell us in this passage is that the man with the hinged board closely resembles the main character of "The End": we are left to infer that Mercier and the man in question have met in the mind of Samuel Beckett. The narrator is more insistently omniscient, however, in Chapter One, when he describes the sufferings of the park ranger: "He suffered torment with his hip, the pain shot down his buttock and up his rectum deep into the bowels and even as far north as the pyloric valve, culminating as a matter of course in uretro-scrotral spasms with quasi-incessant longing to micturate" (MC, p. 14).

Throughout the novel the narrator makes use of various techniques to create the illusion that the events he is narrating actually happened at some time in the past, and that he is providing us with a convenient summary of them. He writes in the past tense, and interjects frequent self-conscious comments--"an altercation ensued, too foolish to be recorded, so foolish was it" (MC, p. 30), for example--to emphasise that he is aware of the need to be selective. Yet he undermines our sense that he observed the actions of Mercier and Camier either as an omniscient or as a first-person

observer with other comments which suggest that the narrative is purely a fiction. Thus his list of Mercier and Camier's arrival times at their meeting place in Chapter One is followed by the comment, "What stink of artifice" (MC, p. 9), and his description of one of the characters awaking one morning by "let him wake, Mercier, Camier, no matter, Camier . . ." (MC, p. 103), emphasising the arbitrariness of the fiction. The fact that the narrator provides us with chapter summaries at the end of every third chapter suggests that he is able to itemise what has happened to his two main characters only after he has written it down. The chapter summaries make it clear that he is presenting us with a story about Mercier and Camier, a story he is making up as he goes along. Its outcome is unknown to him until the end, because it is not until the end that he decides what the outcome will be.

The narrator offers us various hints that the novel is set in Ireland: its two main characters remark on the beauty of the countryside, with its bogs, turf and heather;²⁸ a minor character reflects that he might do well to devote himself to learning the Gaelic dialect;²⁹ amounts of money are given in Sterling in both the French and English texts;³⁰ and in the course of the action, it scarcely ever seems to stop raining. On the other hand, place names are never mentioned as such, so that we are never very sure in what part of Ireland the novel takes place. This is quite deliberate, for as Eric Levy has shown, the narrator's comment on the opening page that Mercier and Camier travelled "through regions untormented on the whole" (MC, p. 7) is the first of a series of hints that the novel is a reworking of Dante's Purgatorio.³¹ Thus the park ranger Mercier and Camier encounter in Chapter One, for example, is a figure who

might be found in any Irish town, but who is at the same time reminiscent of the warder at the gate of Purgatory who holds the keys given him by St. Peter.³²

This curious superimposition of Dante onto a possibly Irish landscape puts us in mind of the fictional counterpart in Murphy to zone one of Murphy's mind--the realistically-presented world of London, Cork and Dublin, which Beckett populates with comically distorted versions of the "people" he "filmed" there. In Mercier and Camier, similarly, the landscape is apparently Irish, but the characters are caricatures whose behaviour and appearance are influenced by Beckett's long-standing interest in The Divine Comedy. Just as Dante the pilgrim meets in the afterlife the spirits of people he has known in Florence, so Mercier and Camier--the novel's counterparts to Dante and Vergil--have dealings with characters the reader has met in earlier Beckett works. But whereas in The Divine Comedy the souls of the departed behave much as they did in real life (Belacqua the lutemaker, for example, continues to be slothful), the earlier Beckett characters who appear in Mercier and Camier often behave very differently. Mr. Graves, the gardener in Watt, is reincarnated as a "pastoral patriarch" (MC, p. 47); Mr. Gall, the manager of a country pub, differs markedly both from Murphy's Lord Gall of Wormwood and from Watt's piano tuners, the Galls father and son.³³ Watt is changed almost beyond recognition: unlike the main character of the novel that bears his name, he drinks double whiskies rather than milk; and instead of being gentle and passive ("He would literally turn the other cheek," Mr. Nixon says of him in Watt, "if he had the energy" (W, p. 18)), he is loud and violent. In the course of a quiet conversation with Mercier and Camier in a pub he

quite unexpectedly seizes Camier's stick, breaks the pint glass of a complete stranger with it, and shouts "Fuck life!" (MC, pp. 117-18).

Interestingly, this episode of gratuitous violence elicits no comment from the narrator, who clearly neither approves nor disapproves of Watt's behaviour. In addition, the narrator withholds comment on the story told by Mr. Madden of his life of violence, arson, lechery, and joy in the slaughter of animals. This is a grotesque parody of Mr. Wilson's life story in Joseph Andrews, and the fact that the narrator does not hold Mr. Madden up to the reader as an example of human depravity makes it plain that Mercier and Camier is not designed, as Fielding's novel is, to delight and instruct. Instead of proclaiming the moral certainties of eighteenth century fiction (or of The Divine Comedy), the narrator maintains a peculiarly twentieth century reticence.

The narrator is equally reticent about the novel's two main characters and the purpose of their journey. We learn little more of Mercier than that he is a tall, elderly man with a beard who has evidently abandoned his family in favour of travelling with Camier; and little more of Camier than that he is a short, elderly man who has relinquished his career as private investigator in order to travel with Mercier. Why they have decided to exchange the security of family and career for the uncertainties of life on the road is unclear even to them:

. . . they raised their glasses and drank, both saying, at the same instant or almost, Here's to you. Camier added, And to the success of our--. But this was a toast he could not complete. Help me, he said.

I can think of no word, said Mercier, nor of any set of words, to express what we imagine we are trying to do. (MC, p. 83)

Elsewhere the narrator tells us that the two are engaged in a "quest" (MC, p. 71), but he never tells us exactly what they are seeking. For a time Mercier believes that the sack they carry is in some way "essential to our salvation" (MC, p. 59), and this suggests momentarily that, like Dante's journey through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise, the journey described in the novel is religious in character. Yet neither Mercier nor Camier is devout, and Mercier in particular is so displeased with what he takes to be God's manifest rancour that at one point he "lift[s] to the sky his convulsed and streaming face" and shouts: "As for thee, fuck thee." In response to this, Camier calmly observes that Mercier "should know better. It's he on the contrary fucks thee" (MC, p. 26). Clearly the two men are not journeying in the expectation that they will ultimately be saved from their sins.

There are various hints in the novel that, if they hope to be saved from anything, it is from the need to formulate answers to metaphysical questions. Mercier seems aware that metaphysical questions are ultimately unanswerable when he says: "I haven't an answer to my name. Oh there was a time I had, and none but the best, they were my only company, I even invented queries to go with them. But I sent them all packing long ago" (MC, p. 87).

In reflecting that "There are two needs: the need you have and the need to have it" (MC, p. 72), Mercier and Camier unwittingly put us in mind of Schopenhauer's concept of metaphysical need, which (as we saw in Chapter Four), Beckett describes as "the need to need" in his essay "Denis Devlin" (DD, p. 91). According to Schopenhauer, our need to answer questions about the nature of the world is great; definitive answers to metaphysical questions will, however, never be

found. Two obstacles stand in our way: the obstacle posed by the forms of perception, which Beckett refers to in "Peintres de l'Empêchement" as "l'empêchement-oeil"; and the obstacle posed by the inherent complexity of phenomena, "l'empêchement-objet." The narrator hints that he is aware of the problem of "l'empêchement-oeil" when he comments in passing on "that harmless lunacy, . . . the consciousness of being" (MC, p. 82); and Mercier obliquely acknowledges the impossibility of making sense of the infinite welter of phenomena when he says that "man wearies in the end of trying to slake his drought at the fireman's hose and seeing his few remaining tapers, one after another, blasted by the oxyhydrogen blowpipe. So he gives himself over, once and for all, to thirsting in the dark" (MC, p. 87).

Unfortunately for Mercier and Camier both, "thirsting in the dark"--yearning, in other words, for the answers to unanswerable metaphysical questions--is an unalterable feature of the human condition. Though the "essential salvation" the two of them appear to be seeking may well be a wish to be saved from the need to seek, that wish will always be denied them. For as Schopenhauer says, "the actual, positive solution of the riddle of the world must be something that human intellect is absolutely incapable of grasping and thinking; so that if a being of a higher kind were to come and take all pains to impart it to us, we would be absolutely incapable of understanding anything of his expositions" (WWI, II, 392).

Neither Mercier and Camier nor the Nouvelles can be said to be major works. They are brief prose pieces, lacking the complexity of either the two novels that precede them or of the fiction (and much of the drama) to follow. The Nouvelles in particular fall short of the standard of originality Beckett set himself in his essays on Joyce and Proust, and mentioned indirectly again in an interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède in 1961. "There is no key [to my works]," he said then. "If the subject of my [works] could be explicated in philosophical terms, there wouldn't have been any reason to write them."³⁴ Yet it is clear that the philosophical "key" to the Nouvelles is Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea, for it is the mystical experience of "Nothing" that the narrator pursues when he finds his quest for knowledge blocked by two essentially Schopenhauerian obstacles, "l'empêchement-oeil" and "l'empêchement-objet."

While he has never spoken publicly of being displeased with the Nouvelles, Beckett was so dissatisfied with Mercier and Camier that when Bordas withdrew its offer to publish the original French version, Mercier et Camier, in 1947, he withheld the novel from publication for over twenty years, and spent a long time translating it into English because he became (in his own words) "bogged down through loathing of the original."³⁵ Yet as John Fletcher has pointed out, Mercier and Camier is of interest for the ways in which it anticipates Beckett's most famous stage play, Waiting for Godot;³⁶ in conjunction with the Nouvelles, it is of interest, too, as a practice pad for Beckett's three finest novels, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable. Whatever their shortcomings, Mercier and Camier

and the Nouvelles have the distinction of being the precursors of great works to come.

NOTES

¹The three essays are: "La Peinture des van Velde, ou: le monde et le pantalon," Cahiers d'Art, 20-21 (1945-46), 349-54 and 356; "Peintres de l'Empêchement," Derrière le Miroir, 11 & 12 (June 1948), 3, 4 and 7; and "Three Dialogues," Transition Forty-Nine, 5 ([Dec.] 1949), 97-103. These essays have been reprinted in Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), together with "Geer van Velde," a brief biographical sketch Beckett published in London Bulletin, 2 (May 1938), 15. Curiously, the title of "La Peinture des van Velde, ou: le monde et le pantalon" is given in a slightly different form in Cohn, as "La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon" (p. 118); I have adopted Cohn's changed version of the title here. All quotations are from Disjecta; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by Dis in the case of "La Peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon" and "Peintres de l'Empêchement," and TD in the case of "Three Dialogues."

²Murphy (Paris: Bordas, 1947); "Poèmes 38-39," Temps Modernes, 2 (November 1946), 288-93. The latter have recently been reprinted as "Poèmes 1937-1939," in Samuel Beckett, Collected Poems in English and French (London: Calder, 1977).

³Bair, p. 347, gives "the last months of 1945" as the date when Beckett began work on Les Bosquets de Bondy, and says that Mercier et Camier was started in July, 1946 (p. 353). In The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), p. 67, Richard L. Admussen draws attention to a manuscript entitled "La Fôret de Bondy/ Camier et Mercier/ I/ autour du pot/ Les Bosquets de Bondy" and bearing a comment in Beckett's writing, "One of the first writings in French, circa 1945, unpublished, jettisoned" held at the University of Texas, Austin. He adds that the manuscript of Mercier et Camier, also held at Texas, bears the starting date 5 May 1946. Mercier et Camier was first published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1970, and translated by Beckett for publication in English by Calder & Boyars in 1974. All quotations are from these editions; page numbers are given in the text.

⁴Dating is a problem. In Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 63, Beckett's bibliographers John Fletcher and Raymond Federman quote from a letter in which Beckett says: "Mercier et Camier was first attempt at novel in French and cannot have preceded Nouvelles." But Richard L. Admussen, who gives the manuscript dates of Mercier et Camier as 5 May to 26 September 1946 (pp. 66-67), notes (p. 83) that "La Fin" was first published in a slightly different form as "Suite" in Les Temps Modernes, 1 (1 July 1946), [107-119]; that "L'Expulsé" was written between 6 and 14 October, though there may have been an earlier version (p. 47); that Premier Amour was started on 28 October 1946 and abandoned on 12 November of the same year (p. 81); and that "Le Calmant" was started on 23

December 1946 (p. 25; no completion date is given in the manuscript), though there may have been an earlier draft.

⁵"La Fin" and "L'Expulsé" were translated with Seaver: the former was first published as "The End" in Merlin, 2 (Summer-Autumn, 1954), 144-59; the latter first appeared as "The Expelled" in Evergreen Review, 6 (Jan.-Feb., 1962), 8-20. Beckett translated "Le Calmant" as "The Calmative," which first appeared in Stories and Texts for Nothing (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Premier Amour remained unpublished until 1970, when it was issued by Les Editions de Minuit; Beckett's translation of it, First Love, was first published by Calder & Boyars in 1973. All quotations from Premier Amour are from the Minuit edition just cited. All quotations from "La Fin," "L'Expulsé" and "Le Calmant" are from Nouvelles et Textes pour rien (Paris: Minuit, 1955). All quotations from the English translations of the Nouvelles are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Prose, 1945-1980 (London: Calder, 1984). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by CSPr.

⁶transition (1948), p. 146. The correct French phrase meaning "To call attention to myself" is "Pour me faire remarquer."

⁷Niklaus Gessner, Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache (Zurich: Juris, 1957), p. 32 n.

⁸Richard Coe, Beckett (London/Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 14.

⁹Herbert Blau, "Meanwhile, Follow the Bright Angels," Tulane Drama Review, 5 (September 1960), 91. In Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1973), pp. 58-59, Ruby Cohn lists other, similar statements made by Beckett about his reasons for writing in French.

¹⁰Beckett returned to English in 1955 with "From an Abandoned Work," a fragment of an unfinished novel first published in Trinity News; a Dublin University Weekly, 3 (7 June 1956), 4.

¹¹Quoted in Bair, p. 438.

¹²Quoted in Bair, p. 439.

¹³In The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 102, John Fletcher says Beckett told him that the Nouvelles "can be taken as three phases of one existence (or four, with the story ironically entitled First Love or Premier Amour) . . ."

¹⁴The narrator mentions his tutor in "First Love" and "The End" (CSPr, pp. 9 and 62); he alludes to Wordsworth in "The Expelled" ("Recollecting these emotions, with the celebrated advantage of tranquillity . . ." (CSPr, pp. 31-32)); he mentions Heraclitus by name in the same Nouvelle (CSPr, p. 26); and alludes to Dante both in "The Calmative," where he mentions "the wood that darkens the mouth of hell" (CSPr, p. 40), and in "First Love," where he mentions "Giudecca" (CSPr, p. 17), the last of the four divisions of Circle IX of Hell (see Inferno XXXIV.117).

¹⁵See previous note.

¹⁶See CSPr, p. 48: "But reality, too tired to look for the right word, was soon restored, . . . the light came back and I had no need to raise my head from the ground to know I was back in the same blinding void as before."

¹⁷Here Beckett is echoing Psalm 121.1: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

¹⁸Driver, 24.

¹⁹When the narrator says in "First Love" that "What constitutes the charm of our country, apart of course from its scant population, and this without help of the meanest contraceptive, is that all is derelict, with the sole exception of history's ancient faeces" (CSPr, p. 8), he seems to be hinting that the story is set in Ireland. But in Premier Amour, p. 17, when he says of Lulu, "N'étant pas française, elle disait Loulou. Moi aussi, n'étant pas français non plus, je disais Loulou comme elle," it appears that the setting is France, and that Lulu and the narrator are expatriates--possibly Irish expatriates. In "The Expelled," the narrator says he is in a capital city (CSPr, p. 27), which may be either Dublin or Paris, but could well be some other capital. Amounts of money are given in Sterling in "The Calmative," and these appear in the same form (not in the equivalent French amounts) in the "Le Calmant." Thus "a penny," for example, in "The Calmative" (CSPr, p. 40) appears as "un penny" in "Le Calmant," p. 53; and "One and six" (CSPr, p. 46) as "Un shilling . . . six pence" in "Le Calmant," p. 68. Similarly, in "The End," "A penny . . . tuppence" (CSPr, p. 65) is given as "Un penny, deux pence" in "La Fin," p. 112. This suggests that the setting in each case is Ireland (or possibly Britain); however, there is no explicit confirmation of this in either Nouvelle.

²⁰Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, trans. A.A. Brill (N.Y.: Modern Library, 1938), p. 234.

²¹It may be that the name "Lulu" is taken from Frank Wedekind's two plays about a character named Lulu, who although not a prostitute, may be described as a woman of loose morals. (See Frank Wedekind, Five Tragedies of Sex, trans. Frances Fawcett and Stephen Spender (London: Vision Press, 1952). Similarly, the name "Anna" may derive from Beckett's interest in the work of the Dadaist writer Kurt Schwitters, who wrote extensively about a fictional character named Anna Blume.

²²"The Calmative" begins: "I don't know when I died. It always seemed to me I died old, about ninety years old, and what years, and that my body bore it out, from head to foot" (CSPr, p. 35). Cf. Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Maud" (1855), V, ll. 239-53, in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, ed. Walter Houghton and G. Robert Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. 104. See Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 121, for his allusion to this poem in Rough for Radio II.

²³Tennyson, Memoir, I, 396, quoted in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 6.

²⁴All quotations from Mercier and Camier are from the Calder & Boyars edition (London, 1974); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by MC.

²⁵In Joseph Andrews (1742; rpt. in Joseph Andrews and Shamela, ed. Martin C. Battestin (London: Methuen, 1965)), Fielding often interrupts the narrative to remind us that he accompanied the characters on their journey. See, for example, Bk. III, Chptr. 7 (p. 207), where he says: "When dinner was removed, the poet began to repeat some verses, which he said were made extempore. The following is a copy of them, procured with the greatest difficulty. . . ." Here the implication is that Fielding was on hand to beg, borrow or steal a copy of the poet's extempore work, though he is never present in the novel as a character. See also Bk. III, Chptr. 6 (p. 199) and Bk. IV, Chptr. 1 (p. 239).

²⁶Brenda Walker, "Disobedient Quotations: Parody in Mercier and Camier," Journal of Beckett Studies, 13 (1988), [forthcoming].

²⁷Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1973), p. 61. Cohn's comment that one of the thieves may be saved and the other damned recalls Harold Hobson's 1956 interview in which Beckett said: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. . . . 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.'" (Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year," International Theatre Annual, No. 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), 153.

²⁸See MC, p. 99.

²⁹See MC, p. 14.

³⁰See, for example, MC, p. 17, where Mercier says "Give him a bob," and MC, p. 18, where the park ranger asks the two main characters for "half-a-crown." In the original French, these amounts are given as "un shilling" and "une demi-couronne," respectively (see Mercier et Camier (Paris: Minuit, 1970), pp. 25 and 27.

³¹See Eric Levy, Beckett and the Voice of Species (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980), pp. 39-53. On p. 42 Levy comments that "At various points, [Mercier and Camier] slip directly from Hell to Paradise with no increase or remission of their suffering. Most of the novel, however, relives the Purgatorio . . ."

³²See Levy, p. 43.

³³Mercier addresses the manager as Mr. Gall (MC, p. 43), but it appears that the man's real name is Mr. Gast (see MC, p. 48).

³⁴Gabriel d'Aubarède, "En attendant . . . Beckett," Nouvelles Littéraires, (16 February 1961), 7. (My translation).

³⁵For a fuller account of the circumstances surrounding the publication of Mercier et Camier, see Bair, pp. 359-60. See Bair, p. 634, for Beckett's comment about getting "bogged down [in the work of translating of Mercier et Camier] through loathing of the original."

³⁶See John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), pp. 113-14.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ART OF FAILURE: MOLLOY, MALONE DIES, THE UNNAMABLE

1

In 1964 Richard Coe derived the term "the art of failure" from Beckett's comment in the Duthuit dialogues that the modern artist has "nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (TD, p. 139).¹ For Beckett, Coe argued,

[art] . . . is the elucidation of the impossible. The human condition is that of an indefinable Néant within, conscious of a possible relationship with an equally indefinable Néant without, yet invalidating that relationship by the very fact of its consciousness. The artist is driven--by the very fact of being an artist--to realise, to create in art, that which is not, which cannot be, because, as soon as it is realised in concrete terms (paint or words) it ceases to be itself. Consequently, it must fail. Beckett's own art likewise is an art of failure: it is by definition trying to do something that it cannot conceivably do--to create and define that which, created and defined, ceases to be what it must be if it is to reveal the truth of the human situation: Man as a Nothing in relation to all things which themselves are Nothing.²

Other critics have subsequently proposed variations on Coe's thesis. Michael Robinson, for example, has suggested that Beckett's writing is an extended attempt to describe "the Void of the Self,"³ an attempt that has failed, and must fail, because the Self defies definition. Similarly, David Hesla has argued that Beckett's art is a self-consciously failed attempt to accommodate itself to "the absurdity of human existence."⁴

The use of terms like "the absurdity of human existence," "Néant," and "the Void of the Self" suggests that Beckett's comments about the modern artist are derivatively Existentialist. Yet Beckett does not employ Existentialist terminology in the dialogues: to date, it has passed unnoticed that his most significant departure from purely critical language is his use, in the first dialogue, of a term from experimental psychology. Here, as the basis for further discussion, Beckett argues that art is expressive of the artist's "natural experience, as revealed to the vigilant coenaesthesia" (TD, p. 138). By "natural experience," he means experience of sense-data; "coenaesthesia" is a term experimental psychologists use to refer to our total bodily consciousness.⁵ Despite the vigilance of the coenaesthesia, the artist is, Beckett implies, limited in what he can hope to learn about the world around him. He is limited by the fact that he is human. Early this century, psychologists established that the world we know through perception is merely a simplification of the infinitely complex world of undifferentiated sense-data.⁶ Moreover, it is a subjective simplification, since the coenaesthesia comprises not only our five senses, but the whole range of our emotions, which invariably colour perception. Beckett develops the implications of this both in the dialogues and in his trilogy of novels, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable, which, written at about the same time as the dialogues, parallels in practice the theory of art he expounds to Duthuit.⁷

It is because our image of the world is a subjective simplification, argues Beckett in the third dialogue, that the modern artist has "nothing to express . . .": whatever he does express will necessarily be inadequate as a comment on the world's infinite

complexity. With the passing of time, artists have become more and more conscious of how complex the world is; correspondingly, the relationship of "aliment" (or subject matter) to "manner of dispatch" (painting, writing, etc.) has been

as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to. The history of painting . . . is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of π were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature (TD, p. 145).

For Beckett, π is a paradigm of the world at large: just as the world of undifferentiated sense-data is infinitely complex, so π is a number that cannot be written in full. Though the history of painting, he argues, has been the history of its attempts to give more and more adequate expression to the complexity of the world, painters have been afraid to admit to its infinite complexity, and to the impossibility of expression. They have behaved like the ancient Pythagoreans, who believed the world to be based on a system of whole numbers, and who were filled with terror at the discovery of the incommensurable π .⁸

In our own time, the painter Pierre Tal Coat has sought to enlarge his "global perception" by freeing it from commitment to either truth or beauty, "twin tyrannies of nature" (TD, p. 138); similarly, André Masson has tried to rid his painting of "the servitude of space" (TD, p. 140). But such art as theirs is in Beckett's view nothing more than "estheticized automatism" (TD, p. 145): programming a computer to calculate π to a hundred thousand decimal places would produce an analogously unsatisfactory result.

Far preferable is the work of Bram van Velde, for Beckett the first modern painter to accept that "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion" (TD, p. 145). Van Velde has forged "a new term of relation" (TD, p. 145); he has demonstrated that for the modern artist, the expressive act must be an expression "of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation" (TD, p. 145).

The expressive act is impossible because the artist has no materials with which to express himself; the paint or words available to him are those he uses in reference to his perception of the world, rather than to its undifferentiated welter of sense-data. Aware that his view of the world is limited, the artist has no axioms from which to proceed with certainty and no valid means of expression. He is therefore robbed of his power and desire to express, but is subject, nonetheless, to an obligation to express. When asked by Duthuit why a sense of obligation exists, Beckett says only: "I don't know" (TD, p. 142).

The artist's difficulties are compounded if he tries to give expression to introspective experience. Unlike experience of the world at large, introspection is based not on direct observation but on the analysis of inner sensations. If inner experience is to be translated into language in an attempt to picture the mind, the language the artist uses must be metaphorical. Accordingly, all descriptions of the mind are partial and tentative; they are tentative because the writer realises that his metaphors are mere indirect descriptions; and they are partial because the metaphors themselves can do no more than reflect the writer's limited experience of the world. What the writer can hope to accomplish is

further limited by the problem of subjectivity, for in trying to describe his mind he has no choice but to rely on his own mind to do the job accurately--even though he may have both conscious and unconscious motives for distorting his description.

In his trilogy of novels Beckett presents us with four narrators engaged in the task of translating inner experience onto the page. Each tries, but fails, to describe his mind. The narrators' art is an art of failure, which goes beyond the dialogues in making extensive reference to Proust, Jung and a variety of other writers. Through their narratives, however, Beckett demonstrates in practical terms the dialogues' main thesis: that the modern artist has "nothing to express . . ."

2

Like van Velde, the first of Molloy's two narrators works under a sense of obligation, without knowing why the obligation exists. At the start of his narrative, he tells us that he is in bed in his mother's room, busily writing, and that he is visited each week by a man who pays him for what he has written. "Yet I don't work for money," Molloy adds. "For what then? I don't know" (M, p. 7).⁹ Later we find that he dislikes writing: he refers to his narrative as "senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (M, p. 13), and as a series of "vast frescoes, dashed off with loathing" (M, p. 63). Everything he has written has, he says, been dictated to him by an inner "voice" (M, p. 88), but he explains that the voice is a metaphor to describe the constant welter of inner sensations impinging on his consciousness.

The fact that his narrative arises from inner sensations, that it is a blend of memory and fiction, and that it is written in isolation from the rest of the world, in bed, all suggest that Molloy derives partly from Proust. For it is well known that Proust completed his major work, A la recherche du temps perdu, as a solitary invalid, and that the events of his novel are a fictionalised version of his own experience. Moreover, Proust found writing compulsive, yet harrowing; he was consoled by the belief that writing about inner sensations--or, as he puts it, "reading" the signs and sensations that exist in the "book" of the mind¹⁰--is ultimately enlightening. Ultimately, the act of "reading" reveals psychological "laws" (R, III, 879)--laws to which Molloy refers in a bitterly ironic passage about freedom:

I am . . . free, yes, I don't know what that means but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (M, p. 13)

Like Proust, Molloy may in the past have hoped to discover the laws of the mind by writing about his inner experience, but he now believes that writing can do no more than reveal the laws' existence. From years of hard work and solitary self-denial, he has learned only that he is subject to an obligation to write; he is no nearer to understanding why the obligation exists. In Molloy's experience, Proust's optimism about what it is possible to learn from writing is unjustified.

Molloy has found writing about introspective experience unproductive partly because the writer must rely on his own judgment

to determine which of his inner sensations are relevant to his writing and which are not. The problem, he says, is that "you must choose, between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so. For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done. . . . And if you are wrong, and you are wrong, I mean when you record circumstances better left unspoken, and leave unspoken others, . . . it is often in good faith, excellent faith" (M, p. 41). Molloy does not share with Proust the belief that there is a certain range of sensations arising from involuntary memory which can be relied on to reveal psychological truths: all sensations are, in his view, of equal potential value. Yet the writer may well have unconscious motives for writing "in good faith" about ultimately unimportant sensations and for neglecting to write about important ones. Moreover, even if the writer does identify the important sensations, he may misinterpret their significance.

Molloy's difficulties are compounded by the fact that his mind, though once attuned to astronomy, geology, anthropology, and psychiatry, is now, after years of grappling with the problems of writing, in ruins:

[It is] a place with neither plan nor bounds and of which I understand nothing, not even of what it is made, still less into what. And the thing in ruins. . . . But it is not the kind of place where you go, but where you find yourself, sometimes, not knowing how, and which you cannot leave at will. . . . I listen and the voice . . . murmur[s] that all wilts and yields, as if loaded down, but here there are no loads, and . . . the light too, down towards an end it seems can never come. (M, pp. 39-40)

That Molloy should be uncertain of the precise nature of his "ruins" is a reflection in part of the fact that the mind is difficult to describe satisfactorily, and also of the fact that the instrument of description is his own ruined intellect. It is a place, however,

where "you find yourself"--a place to which he is sometimes compelled to withdraw, in spite of himself, to seek the truth about his inner experience. Frequent visits to his mind have offered Molloy the hope that he might some day understand it--that it might some day "wilt and yield" to his investigations. But the comment that "here there are no loads" indicates not only that he is dissatisfied with his metaphor, but that his investigations have been fruitless.

Molloy's "ruins" metaphor arises from his description of Lousse's house and illustrates an important fact about the story of his journey: namely, that it exists to provide metaphors to describe his inner experience. The influence of story on metaphor is even more explicit when he says, "I think I stayed in several rooms [of Lousse's house] one after the other, or alternately, I don't know. In my head there are several windows, that I do know, but perhaps it is always the same one, open variously on the parading universe" (M, p. 51). Interestingly, this passage recalls C.G. Jung's observation that "in our most intimate psychic life, we live in a kind of house which has doors and windows to the world. . . ." ¹¹ Another Jungian metaphor occurs later in the narrative, when Molloy says of his "region," "don't imagine [it] ended at the coast, that would be a grave mistake. For it was this sea, too, its reefs and distant islands, and its hidden depths. And I too once went forth on it, in a sort of oarless skiff, but I paddled with an old bit of driftwood. And I sometimes wonder if I ever came back, from that voyage" (M, p. 69). This passage is reminiscent of Jung's well-known comparison of the conscious mind to islands and continents in the vast sea of the unconscious, ¹² and conveys once again that Molloy has been "voyaging" introspectively for much of his life.

Despite his echoes of Jung, Molloy is clearly unaware of his narrative's Jungian significance. For years he has travelled repeatedly in search of his mother and now feels obliged to write an account of his most recent, unsuccessful attempt to find her; yet he is unable to furnish any more than a vague explanation of what has motivated his journeys. Love is not a factor, for he describes his mother with the utmost harshness throughout his narrative; and although he says he would like to establish relations with her "on a less precarious footing" (M, p. 87), the possibility of his establishing any sort of relations with her is severely prejudiced by the fact that she is blind, deaf and senile. Clearly, Molloy's reasons for wanting to see her are psychological; he hints, in fact, that his journey is motivated both by incestuous sexual desire and by a desire to return to the womb. Throughout, he knows that his narrative will end with his failure to find her, and will thereby provide a parallel to his failure to translate inner experience onto the page. But he gives no indication of being aware that there is a Jungian explanation for his desire to see his mother: because he must rely on his mind to analyse itself, he does not realise that his problem, in Jungian terms, is that he has identified too closely with his anima.

According to Jung, each of us comprises a number of personalities, some conscious and some unconscious. One of these is the anima, an unconscious personality which exists only in men and which represents the sum of a man's latent feminine characteristics. Normally it seeks out physical counterparts to itself in various women, the first of these being the man's mother, and the others, "those women who arouse the man's feelings, whether in a positive or

a negative sense" ("Relations," p. 195). Jung points out that a "compensatory relationship" ("Relations," p. 190) exists between the anima and the persona--the protective mask most persons assume in order to play a role in society. A boy's father serves as his first model persona, though as he attains to manhood, the boy, if he is to cope adequately with the world, must develop a persona of his own. Similarly, the mother acts as the boy's first anima counterpart and helps him to protect himself against "the dangers that threaten from the darkness of his psyche" ("Relations," p. 195). In Jung's view, separation of boy from mother is a crucial step in a child's development, for it is important that a child should learn to deal with the dangers of his unconscious mind himself.

If a man identifies too closely with his persona--if he comes to believe that he is the role he plays--he may cut himself off from his anima and become, as Jung puts it, "blind to the existence of inner realities" ("Relations," p. 197). Alternatively, if he fails to develop a persona, he can easily identify with his unconscious anima and become "blind to the reality of the world, which for him has merely the value of an amusing or fantastic playground" ("Relations," p. 197). That Molloy is blind to the world is evident throughout his narrative--as, for example, in the passage where he is asked by a policeman to produce his identification papers:

Your papers, he said, I knew it a moment later. Not at all, I said, not at all. Your papers! he cried. Ah my papers. Now the only papers I carry with me are bits of newspaper, to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool. . . . In a panic I took this paper from my pocket and thrust it under his nose. (M, p. 20)

The comment "I knew it a moment later" is at one with Molloy's assertion elsewhere that when words are spoken to him he normally

hears them "a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning" (M, p. 50). He has been living away from people and conversation for so long, he explains, that he is no longer able to understand immediately what is said to him. When in the above passage he replies "Not at all," it is not to "Your papers," but to a different utterance ("Would you mind showing me your papers, please?" for example). Molloy is aware of being out of touch with the everyday world, but does not realise that he has neglected his persona and identified too closely with his anima.

Nor does he realise that there is a Jungian explanation for abandoning Lousse in order to continue his search for his mother. Molloy explains his decision to leave Lousse by suggesting that she is a Circe figure guilty of insinuating poisons into his food and drink to prevent him from returning to the Penelope of his incestuous desire. In Jungian terms, the problem is that his anima has never found a satisfactory counterpart to itself in anyone but his mother;¹³ his departure is thus prompted by an obscure but urgent feeling that if he succeeds in establishing relations with her on a firm basis, he will be able to come to terms with troublesome elements in the "darkness of his psyche," and thus find psychological peace.

Especially troubling to Molloy is the awareness that he is subject to an inner compulsion to write, even though writing is hateful to him. It is hateful because futile. Although oblivious to his narrative's Jungian overtones, he realises in general terms that the problems of selection and subjectivity will always prevent him from discovering the truth about his mind. Moreover, he is aware that, even if he could overcome these problems, the metaphors he uses

to describe inner experience are inadequate for the purpose. Because experience of the mind is non-perceptual, Molloy must either use metaphors to describe his mind indirectly, or be silent--as he recognises in his figurative use of the term "voice" to describe his inner sensations: ". . . every time I . . . speak of a voice saying, far away inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple . . . I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace" (M, p. 88). Molloy's bitterness arises here from knowing that the choice offered by this "convention" is spurious; as much as he might like to keep silent, he is obliged to write.

"[It] little matters what I say," he comments elsewhere, "this, this or that or any other thing. Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept" (M, pp. 31-32). Saying is inventing in that whatever Molloy says about his selections of inner sensations will be true for those sensations only, and not for his mind as a whole. Instead of discovering "the laws of the mind" through writing, he will only produce inventions--that is to say, fictions--about it. But the inventing involves Molloy in finding metaphors with which to express himself, and these must be from his own experience--from his own firsthand experience and from his reading. The metaphors he uses derive, in other words, from his knowledge of the world at large, which is subject to the limitations imposed by perception. Molloy may think at times that by inventing more and more elaborate metaphors, he is escaping from the

impossibility of describing his mind; but he realises ultimately that all he is doing is stammering out the words he has learned—words that describe an imperfect image of the world. Writing about either the world or the mind is misery: it is "life without [the appropriate words] as it is [expressed]."

Having withdrawn from the world in favour of a life of introspection, Molloy has in any case limited the amount he can know about it. This is clear from his puzzlement over the knife-rest he takes away with him when he leaves Lousse:

. . . it inspired me with a kind of veneration, for there was no doubt in my mind . . . but that it had a most specific function always to be hidden from me. I could therefore puzzle over it endlessly without the least risk. For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. It is then the true division begins, of twenty-two by seven for example, and the pages fill with the true ciphers at last. (M, p. 64)

Molloy is "beyond knowing anything" in the sense that he is too far removed from bourgeois living to ever remember the purpose an object like a knife-rest serves. He can therefore puzzle over it endlessly without the least risk of its losing its mystery. However, his statement goes beyond the immediate problem of identifying the object.

What Molloy means to say more generally is that there is no virtue in being ignorant of simple facts like, for example, that twenty-two divided by seven is an approximation of pi, or that there is a certain number of ways of arranging sixteen sucking-stones in four pockets. Nor is there any virtue in not wanting to acquire such information. Yet one must recognise that knowledge of mathematical facts, as of all other facts, is only relative knowledge. Man is not

omniscient and never will be: his discoveries will always be limited. In the French Molloy, the phrase "to know you are beyond knowing anything" is given as "savoir ne rien pouvoir savoir"¹⁴--to know it is impossible to know anything. Modern computers make it possible to know the value of pi to millions of decimal places; yet it is impossible to know pi's full value because it would take a computer all of eternity to calculate it to an infinite number of places. We can only imagine pi written in full--just as, more generally, we can only imagine what absolute knowledge is like.

Molloy puts this obliquely. At the point where we recognise that absolute knowledge is beyond human reach, he says, the Proustian "pages" of the mind fill with an analogue to man's limited sense of the world's (and the mind's) infinite complexity: the decimal value of twenty-two sevenths, an approximation of pi. In referring to the "peace" that enters the soul of the "incurious seeker," Molloy is being ironic: the seeker after truth about inner experience is incurious in the sense that he realises he will never discover absolute truths about his mind; yet he is subject to a harrowing compulsion to continue the search nonetheless.

Like Molloy, the narrator of the second part of the novel, Jacques Moran, writes under a sense of inner compulsion, without knowing why. Initially Moran tells us that his narrative is a report of his unsuccessful search for Molloy, to be submitted to his superior, Youdi. But in the end he reveals that he wrote it in response to the urgings of an inner "voice": "I have spoken of a voice telling me things. . . . It told me to write the report" (M, pp. 175-76). In addition, though he begins his narrative with the statements, "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (M,

p. 92), he ends by contradicting himself: "[then] I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (M, p. 176).

Moran's self-contradiction goes further than to suggest merely that he started writing at a different time and under different conditions. It negates the impression he has carefully cultivated, that the events he has related actually happened, and suggests that, like the first part of the novel, the second is a story designed to provide metaphors to describe inner experience.

G.C. Barnard has argued interestingly that Moran reveals himself as an anally fixated character, but this is not to say that his narrative discloses Freudian faults alone.¹⁵ Unlike Molloy, Moran shows no sign of being aware of the problems involved in writing about his mind. He does not seem to realise that there are problems involved in the use of metaphoric language or that his mind may work against him in interpreting the data of introspection. Yet, just as Molloy unwittingly provides us with evidence that he has identified too closely with his anima, so Moran reveals, without realising it, that he has allowed himself to become dominated by his persona. Like Molloy's, his art is an art of failure: though he tries to discover the truth about his inner experience in the course of translating it into language, the problems defined in the Duthuit dialogues ultimately defeat him.

That Moran is initially persona-dominated is clear from the fact that he takes his role as detective too seriously, allowing qualities that are an important part of his job--curiosity, suspicion and rationality, for example--to extend into other areas of his life. Curiosity prompts him to spy on his neighbours: "[in] the night

. . . I like to go up to a window, lit or unlit, and look into the room, to see what is going on. I cover my face with my hands and peer through my fingers. I have terrified more than one neighbour in this way. He rushes outside, finds no one" (M, p. 123). Similarly, suspicion prompts him to check and re-check his store of beer, to see that none is stolen by Martha, the housekeeper; he also interrogates her, preposterously, about the lack of onions in his Sunday stew. Moran's rationality manifests itself in his Cartesian insistence on dividing each of his problems into a series of smaller problems and attacking each of these in order of magnitude. For the sake of efficiency he lives by a schedule, and is fanatical about punctuality, propriety, and order. Gaber's unexpected visit interferes with his going to Mass, and Moran suffers as a result, not so much as a devout Catholic whose observance of duty has been thwarted, but as a man whose neatly planned schedule has been spoiled. He arranges for special Communion with his parish priest, who says, after the ceremony is over, "Now we can talk." Moran's private response is: "I had nothing else to say to him. . . . But being slightly in advance of my schedule I resigned myself to allowing him eight minutes" (M, p. 101).

According to Jung, too close an identification with the persona is accompanied by a virtual eclipse of the anima (or "soul"; Jung uses the terms interchangeably), so that there are people

who really do . . . believe they are what they pretend to be. The 'soullessness' of such an attitude is, however, only apparent, for under no circumstances will the unconscious tolerate this shifting of the centre of gravity. When we examine such cases critically, we find that the excellence of the mask is compensated by the 'private life' going on behind it. The pious Drummond once lamented that 'bad temper is the vice of the virtuous.' Whoever builds up too good a persona

for himself naturally has to pay for it with irritability.
("Relations," p. 191)

Moran is irritable in the extreme: when his son opposes him on the question of leaving his sick-bed to accompany him on the journey, Moran's reaction is almost homicidal. First he beats his son with an umbrella, holding it by the end with both hands. Then he rushes outside, and seizing an axe, begins hacking madly at an old chopping block until the blade sinks into it so deeply that he cannot get it out. Yet in his own eyes he is only doing his duty as a father, a duty which, with a remarkable lack of self-awareness, he discharges relentlessly, heedless of his son's reactions.

Before his journey he is deeply troubled at the prospect of seeking Molloy and retires to his room to collect his thoughts. He reports that "I wandered in my mind, slowly, noting every detail of the labyrinth, its paths as familiar as those of my garden and yet ever new, as empty as the heart could wish or alive with strange encounters. . . . Unfathomable mind, now beacon, now sea" (M, p. 106). As a man who identifies with his own mask, Moran is blind to the realities of his unconscious. His conscious mind is as familiar as the paths of his garden; his unconscious is as unfathomable as the sea. He pictures Molloy as something hidden, dark and frightening:

He had very little room. His time too was limited. He hastened incessantly on, as if in despair, towards extremely close objectives. Now, a prisoner, he hurled himself at I know not what narrow confines, and now, hunted, he sought refuge near the centre. . . .

He was forever on the move. I had never seen him rest. Occasionally he stopped and glared furiously about him. (M, p. 113)

This description, with its suggestions of confinement, limitation, and rage, indicates clearly the extent of Moran's fear of the psychic

unknown. He attempts initially to defend himself by imagining he is Molloy's superior; he thinks of him as "everyman" (M, p. 111), and of himself as Molloy's saviour. But later he is overcome by terror, and says that at the mere thought of Molloy, "I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact" (M, p. 113).

In one respect, "just the opposite of myself" seems inaccurate, since we have seen how great Moran's capacity for violence is in the episode with his son. Yet he is just the opposite of the cool, rational detective he believes himself to be, the sense of certainty implicit in his short, direct sentences and similarly short paragraphs belying the intense uncertainty he feels within himself. What Molloy represents to him, in Jungian terms, is his shadow, "the character that summarises a person's uncontrolled emotional manifestations."¹⁶ Molloy is to Moran as Hyde to Jekyll, and if Moran is to come to terms with him he must engage in an introspective journey.

The journey is an extended metaphor for Moran's psychological transformation. What he experiences is a variation on the Jungian process of individuation--the process by which the conscious and unconscious elements of an individual's mind interact to achieve a new psychic balance. As his "journey" proceeds, various unconscious personalities within Moran begin to impinge on his consciousness. He has been uncomfortably aware of his shadow (though he does not use the term) in the person of Molloy, but after a period of solitary self-examination in the woods, reaches the point of accepting, rather than fearing it. His shadow is now represented by the first of two strangers to visit him unexpectedly. Though the visitor is a

potential threat (he is carrying a menacing-looking club), Moran maintains his courage by replying to the man's demand for bread with an offer of fish, thus placing himself in the position of Christ dispensing food to the multitude--just as earlier, he had imagined himself a saviour to Molloy.

The second man who visits him in the woods is representative of his persona: he is a detective apparently in search of the first stranger, a detective who resembles Moran. He had, says Moran, the "same little abortive moustache, same little ferrety eyes, same paraphimosis of the nose, and a thin red mouth that looked as if it was raw from trying to shit its tongue" (M, p. 151). Moran considers the man a threat and a pest: he now implicitly recognises that he has allowed his role as detective to dominate his life. In contrast to his reaction to the first man, his reaction to the second is irrational and violent. He beats him to death in a frenzy, and of the dead man says with some satisfaction, "[he] no longer resembled me" (M, p. 151).

Moreover, he comments that his mind is now "calmer than it had been for a long time" (M, p. 154). From this we might conclude that Moran's destruction of his persona has been a healthy mental development enabling him to proceed to the final stage of the Jungian process--the stage at which the individual becomes aware of an inner personality otherwise hidden from him: the Self. Curiously, though, Moran becomes aware of this inner personality before his persona has been destroyed: between the visit of the first man and that of the second, he experiences a sensation "at first all darkness and bulk, with a noise like the grinding of stones, then suddenly as soft as water flowing. And then I saw a little globe swaying up slowly from

the depths, . . . then little by little a face, with holes for the eyes and mouth and other wounds, and nothing to show if it was a man's face or a woman's face, a young face or an old face . . ." (M, pp. 148-49). Though Moran is uncertain whether the face is a man's or a woman's or whether it is young or old, we know it represents the emergence of a new sense of self because he says afterwards, in a passage echoing this one, "I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered" (M, p. 170).

That Moran destroys his persona after having become aware of his Self is inconsistent with the successful completion of the individuation process. He has met the threat posed by his shadow with an offering of fish and has derived from his positive action a new-found sense of peace and self-knowledge. But then, having faced and accepted his inner world, he turns viciously on his persona--his role as detective--and, in terms of the narrative, murders it. With that murder, his inner peace is destroyed. Instead of achieving a balance between the conscious and unconscious parts of his mind, he falls into an unhealthy identification with his unconscious. He is even more unbalanced in his behaviour to his son than he was prior to the journey, and after a particularly "violent scene" (M, p. 160), the boy abandons him. Moran then makes his way slowly home: it is another sign that he is not completely at peace that he ponders a number of grotesque theological questions. Formerly, Moran's religious faith had been casual; now he rejects it altogether. He refuses to see his priest after returning home and says of God, "[H]e is beginning to disgust me" (M, p. 105). His new attitude is wholly at odds with Jung's description of the end of the individuation

process, which is meant to be akin to the discovery of the "Kingdom of Heaven" within ("Relations," p. 224).

Towards the end of his narrative, Moran comes to resemble Molloy. His clothes deteriorate until, like Molloy's, they are in rags; he becomes partly crippled; and he begins to abandon the style of the early part of his story for the longer paragraphs and more involved sentences that characterise Molloy's writing. Moreover, shortly after his return, he starts to make plans for a future life of "vagrancy and freedom" (M, p. 132)--a tramp-like existence prefigured in the earlier narrative. The implication is that he is in the process of exchanging one form of madness for another: he has ceased to be a man who identifies with his persona and is becoming the opposite--a man whose identification is with his anima.

Though he is unaware of it, Moran's madness is demonstrably Jungian in character, and his physical suffering Proustian. Moran experiences a sharp pain in the knee just before starting his search for Molloy, and in the end is obliged to acquire a pair of crutches. Similarly, Molloy is crippled in one leg while in search of his mother and ultimately loses the use of the other. The two narrators' inability to stand or sit recalls a passage in Proust, a passage to which Beckett draws attention in his 1931 essay:¹⁷

The narrator arrives at Balbec-Plage, a holiday resort in Normandy, for the first time, accompanied by his grandmother. They are staying at the Grand Hotel. He enters his room, feverish and exhausted after his journey. But sleep, in this inferno of unfamiliar objects, is out of the question. All his faculties are on the alert, on the defensive, vigilant and taut, and as painfully incapable of relaxation as the tortured body of La Balue in his cage, where he could neither stand upright nor sit down. (P, p. 24)

Proust's narrator suffers, according to Beckett, because he has been forced to exchange a familiar environment for an unfamiliar one. Similarly, Moran is obliged to abandon his comfortable bourgeois existence for an anguished journey of introspection in search of Molloy. Molloy finds the mysteries of his mind "familiar mysteries" (M, p. 40), but, like Moran, is compelled to examine them endlessly and to suffer in performing the hopeless task of translating what he discovers onto the page. In both cases, the physical pain of being crippled has a counterpart in the psychological suffering that arises from writing about introspection.

Proust emphasises in A la recherche du temps perdu that the creation of a work of art--the act of "reading" the inner sensations in the "book" of the mind--can only be realised by way of self-sacrificing dedication:

Chaque événement, que ce fût l'affaire Dreyfus, que ce fût la guerre, avait fourni d'autres excuses aux écrivains pour ne pas déchiffrer ce livre-là. . . . Mais ce n'était que des excuses, parce qu'ils n'avaient pas, ou plus, de génie, c'est-à-dire d'instinct. Car l'instinct dicte le devoir et l'intelligence fournit les prétextes pour l'éluder. Seulement les excuses ne figurent point dans l'art, les intentions n'y sont pas comptées: à tout moment l'artiste doit écouter son instinct, ce qui fait que l'art est ce qu'il y a de plus réel, la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier. (R, III, 879-80)

Beckett echoes the sentiments of the last part of this passage in his essay on Proust when he speaks of the "'invisible reality'" that exists in the mind and "damns the life of the body on earth as a pensum" (P, p. 93). Molloy in turn says that writing about inner experience is a matter of having to "stammer out . . . the remnants of a pensum" (M, p. 32); Moran describes writing as a "penance" (M, p. 133), and says of the "voice" that told him to write the report: "it is within me and exhorts me to continue to the end the faithful

servant I have always been, of a cause that is not mine, and patiently fulfil in all its bitterness my calamitous part, as it was my will, when I had a will, that others should" (M, p. 132). The two narrators' obligation to express anticipates that of van Velde as it is described in the Duthuit dialogues; however, it would appear that the dialogues and Molloy have a common provenance in Proust's comment that artistic creation is "la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier."

Moran has little idea how austere his future life will be. He is optimistic about the task of writing, his inner voice having told him that the memory of his narrative "brought scrupulously to a close will help me to endure the long anguish" (M, p. 132) that lies ahead. In addition he believes that future writing will teach him things about his mind he has never known before. What is clear, however, is that Moran is at an earlier stage of awareness than Molloy. He does not realise that he has made a serious mistake in interpreting his inner experience, and he has yet to discover the impediments to truth and freedom so well known to Molloy, which will ensure that his art will always be an art of failure.

It is a measure of Moran's deluded optimism that on his journey home he enters with gusto into the life of an independent solitary. He steadfastly refuses to seek help, despite the fact that he is crippled and alone; in this he is once again coming to resemble Molloy, who views all human contact contemptuously, as a form of weakness. Molloy spurns the assistance offered him not only by Lousse, but also by the social worker who visits him after his arrest; and when approached in the woods by a charcoal burner in need of companionship, Molloy knocks him down in disgust.

The two narrators' emphasis on the virtues of self-isolation is alien to Jung, whose work is dedicated to the search for individual wholeness which, as he repeatedly says, cannot be realised apart from one's relationship to one's fellows. Yet the theme of self-isolation is consistent with the passage in Beckett's essay on Proust in which he treats of Proust's attitude to love and friendship. This is an important passage, for it anticipates the relationship Beckett establishes between his novel's art of failure on the one hand, and Proust and Jung on the other. Beckett begins by enthusiastically endorsing Proust's unromantic treatment of love and goes on to say that

Proust situates friendship somewhere between fatigue and ennui. He does not agree with the Nietzschean conception that friendship must be based on intellectual sympathy, because he does not see friendship as having the least intellectual significance. . . . For him the exercise of friendship is tantamount to a sacrifice of that only real and incommunicable essence of oneself to the exigencies of a frightened habit whose confidence requires to be restored by a dose of attention. It represents a false movement of the spirit--from within to without, from the spiritual assimilation of the immaterial as provided by the artist, as extracted by him from life, to the abject and indigestible husks of direct contact with the material and concrete . . . The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy. He cannot practise friendship, because friendship is the centrifugal force of self-fear, self-negation. (P, pp. 64-66)

This passage is based on what Proust says of friendship in Le côté de Guermantes:

. . . j'ai peine à comprendre que des hommes de quelque génie, et par exemple un Nietzsche, aient eu la naïveté [d'attribuer à l'amitié] une certaine valeur intellectuelle et en conséquence de se refuser à des amitiés auxquelles l'estime intellectuelle n'eût pas été liée. Oui, cela m'a toujours été un étonnement de voir qu'un homme qui poussait la sincérité avec lui-même jusqu'à se détacher, par scrupule de conscience, de la musique de Wagner, se soit imaginé que la vérité peut se réaliser dans ce mode d'expression par nature confus et inadéquat que sont,

en général, des actions et, en particulier, des amitiés. . . .
 [Tout l'effort de l'amitié] est de nous faire sacrifier la
 partie seule réelle et incommunicable (autrement que par le
 moyen de l'art) de nous-même, à un moi superficiel, qui . . .
 trouve un attendrissement confus à sentir soutenu sur des étais
 extérieurs . . ." (R, II, 394)

Beckett is right to claim that Proust regards friendship both as a sacrifice of the artist's innermost self to the demand for human company, and as a diversion from the task of translating inner experience--the experience of involuntary memory--onto the page. But he makes Proust's comment about Nietzsche seem more negative than it actually is, and omits to mention what Proust has to say in the remainder of the passage:

Mais quelle que fût mon opinion sur l'amitié, même pour ne parler que du plaisir qu'elle me procurait, d'une qualité si médiocre qu'elle ressemblait à quelque chose d'intermédiaire entre la fatigue et l'ennui, il n'est breuvage si funeste qui ne puisse à certaines heures devenir précieux et réconfortant en nous apportant le coup de fouet qui nous était nécessaire, la chaleur que nous ne pouvons pas trouver en nous-même. (R, II, 395)

It would be wrong to say that Beckett ignores the above passage altogether, for in commenting that "Proust situates friendship somewhere between fatigue and ennui" he is clearly echoing it. Yet he fails to acknowledge Proust's observation that at certain times, friendship can generate in us "la chaleur que nous ne pouvons pas trouver en nous-même." Molloy and Moran are equally grudging: each maintains that the artist who writes about inner experience must work in complete isolation from other people.

After finishing, in 1931, the essay in which he praises so highly the ideas of solitary dedication to art, Beckett left Ireland and a prestigious lectureship to begin his career as a writer in self-imposed exile on the Continent.¹⁸ His indictment of friendship in "Proust" suggests that he thought he might discover in solitude

some of the psychological truths which Proust maintains are accessible through writing. If so, Molloy is a testimony to Beckett's disillusionment--to his recognition of the problems implicit not only in Proust, but in his distorted interpretation of Proust. It is no accident that each of Beckett's narrators is partly based on Beckett himself:¹⁹ Moran's departure from bourgeois surroundings parallels Beckett's own exchange of a comfortable existence in Dublin for years of self-denial in Europe, while Molloy is a caricature of the figure he might have become had he not repudiated his early enthusiasm for exaggerated Proustian solitude.

It is important to recognise that the two narrators' self-imposed solitude represents a distortion of Proust and a deviation from Jung, since Molloy might otherwise appear to be critical of their work. For Molloy and Moran, introspection is not therapeutic; yet the psychological imbalance it produces in them is a comment not on Jung, but instead, on their extreme unwillingness to participate in society. Similarly, though Beckett demonstrates that the "laws of the mind" are impossibly elusive, further biographical information suggests that Molloy was written less as a criticism of Proust, than as self-criticism. In 1961, Beckett told Gabriel d'Aubarède that he conceived of Molloy "et la suite le jour où j'ai pris conscience de ma bêtise."²⁰ He did not elaborate on what he meant by "ma bêtise"; yet it is significant that he dwells on the folly of self-isolation not only in Molloy but also in "et la suite"--Malone Dies and The Unnamable. In each novel, self-isolation is folly because it leads the writer no closer to the truth about either his mind or the world at large; he commits himself to suffering, to denial of the pleasures of human contact, and to the risk of madness, without any

prospect of compensation. For as Beckett emphasises in his dialogues with Duthuit, the modern artist has, inescapably, "nothing to express. . . ."

3

Like Molloy and Moran, the narrator of the second novel of the trilogy, Malone Dies, is a partly autobiographical figure, a writer of fiction who shares Beckett's interest in literature, art, philosophy and psychology, and who writes about characters who are themselves semi-autobiographical. So close is the resemblance between Malone and Beckett that at times it is difficult to distinguish between their two voices, as for example when Malone says that his death will mean the end of earlier Beckett characters:

Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloyes, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave . . . How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them? Off-hand I can only think of four . . . There was the old butler too, in London I think, . . . I cut his throat with his razor, that makes five (MD, p. 236).²¹

Here Malone is speaking as though he were Beckett, for it would clearly be with Beckett's death rather than his own that nothing further would be written about Murphy, Mercier, Molloy and Moran. Moreover, it is Beckett, not Malone, who is responsible for killing the five characters: the policeman in Mercier and Camier and the two nameless characters in Molloy, who are all beaten to death; Murphy, who dies in a fire; and Murphy's retired butler, whose life ends when Beckett has him cut his own throat. And it is Beckett who goes on "beyond the grave" to write the last novel of the trilogy, The

Unnamable. He breathes life into its nameless, semi-autobiographical narrator after Malone has died, and has the narrator make frequent reference to Murphy, Mercier, Molloy, Moran and Malone.

Beckett identifies with Malone and the other narrators of the trilogy partly because he wants to suggest that he is at one with them in being unable to solve the problems involved in writing about introspection. If his narrators seem both to resemble him and to evolve into each other, it is in part because they are meant to provide a record of his and their growing awareness of the inevitability of failure. Moran leaves his bourgeois home, as Beckett did, in order to live like Molloy and write about inner experience; Malone in his bed resembles Molloy, but has decided--initially, at least--not to struggle against the problems that confronted the earlier narrator.

Why he has made this decision becomes clear when he describes his past experience of writing. In the beginning, he says,

I turned on all the lights, I took a good look all round, I began to play with what I saw. . . . All went well at first. . . . If I said, Now I need a hunchback, immediately one came running, proud as punch of his fine hunch that was goint to perform. It did not occur to him that I might have to ask him to undress. But it was not long before I found myself alone, in the dark. That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding. (MD, p. 180)

Here Malone's voice blends with Beckett's as he describes having used the materials of his perceptual experience to create comic grotesques like the hunchbacked Mr. Hackett and others, only to have their comedy sour. Then it blends with Molloy's as he tells how he became an incurious stumbler through the darkness of his mind.²²

Introspection supplanted fiction in his life, but only for a time; eventually he began writing again, though

little by little with a different aim, no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail. . . . What I sought, when I struggled out of my hole, then aloft through the stinging air towards an inaccessible boon, was the rapture of vertigo, the letting go, the fall, the gulf, the relapse to darkness, to nothingness, to earnestness, to home, to him waiting for me always, who needed me and whom I needed, who took me in his arms and told me to stay with him always, who gave me his place and watched over me, who suffered every time I left him, whom I have often made suffer and seldom contented, whom I have never seen. (MD, p. 195)

Though this description is reminiscent of certain mystical accounts of finding God within, Malone's scepticism about the content of certain mystic texts elsewhere in the novel makes it clear that he is not a conventional Christian mystic.²³ On the other hand, there is every possibility that Malone shares Beckett's longstanding interest in Jung, who observes repeatedly in his work that the mystical experience has an important secular counterpart in the individual's discovery of his essential being or Self.²⁴ As we have already seen, discovery of the Self follows on the individual's dawning awareness of the part played by his unconscious in the workings of his mind. As the individual's awareness of his unconscious increases, so too does his knowledge of the Self; however, total self-knowledge is impossible to achieve, for the unconscious is by nature unknowable in its totality.²⁵ Through personal experience, Malone has discovered that perfect self-knowledge is an "inaccessible boon": time and again he has struggled out of his immersion in the everyday world of perception to soar high into the realms of introspective discovery, then plummet towards an ultimately limited self-awareness.

Writing about introspection is no more satisfactory: since the mind is imperceptible, it must be described indirectly, in metaphorical language. Malone's metaphors of flight and of the love of one man for another, though beautifully lyrical, describe his introspective experience only obliquely; it is in recognition of his metaphors' inadequacy that he has accepted the inevitability of writing "in order to fail." However, now that he is dying, Malone is no longer interested in writing about introspection, earnestly and in vain; instead, he prefers to let the "clown" (MD, p. 194) lurking within him write comic fiction about a character as different from himself as possible.

Writing about this character is part of a larger programme Malone has set himself. Partly to relieve the tedium of dying, he has decided to tell himself three stories: the first about a man, or perhaps a man and a woman; the second about an animal; and the third about a thing--"a stone probably" (MD, p. 182). The stories are to be frivolous and fictional rather than soberly introspective; yet an "occasional interlude to be feared" (MD, p. 182). Occasionally Malone will depart from his stories to reflect earnestly on himself, and in spite of his intentions to the contrary, will allow material from his autobiographical "interludes" to find its way into his fiction.

Malone's lack of control over the content of his stories arises from his confused state of mind. Though at the start of the novel he insists that his room is not in a hospital or asylum, he soon contradicts himself. He tells us, for example, that he is often aware of the sound of men weeping and laughing nearby, that he himself is subject to uncontrollable urges, and that he has an

attendant who is careful not to approach him too closely. Moreover, his description of the madmen in the last of his stories clearly suggests that they are fellow inmates recalled from a time prior to his being put into solitary confinement. "The youth . . ., the Saxon, the thin one and the giant. I don't know if they have changed. I don't remember. May the others forgive me" (MD, p. 283; my italics). Malone's isolation from the other patients and his desire for forgiveness also suggest that he may be guilty of having committed an act of violence---a murder, perhaps, like the one he describes in his story. Significantly, in any case, his confusion of memory and fiction is allied to Schopenhauer's comment in The World as Will and Idea that in madmen, "the thread of memory is broken . . . and no uniformly connected recollection of the past is possible. Particular scenes of the past are known correctly, . . . but there are gaps in their recollection which they fill up with fictions . . ." (WWI, I, 249).

This observation of Schopenhauer's is of particular interest in relation to Malone's first story. The story is not about a man, as Malone had planned, but about a boy named Saposcat, who is meant to be wholly fictional, but is unintentionally semi-autobiographical. "Nothing," says Malone initially, "is less like me than this patient, reasonable child" (MD, p. 193); yet in one of his interludes, Malone suddenly reveals that, like Saposcat, he grew up in a house on the edge of the country.²⁶ In addition, he is dismayed to find, early in his story, that he has inadvertently described his character as having eyes the colour of his own. Having said that Sapo often "gazed straight before him with eyes as pale and unwavering as a gull's" (MD, p. 192), Malone adds: "I don't like those gull's eyes.

They remind me of an old shipwreck, I forget which. I know it is a small thing. But I am easily frightened now. I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. Nothing is more real than nothing. They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark. But I am on my guard now" (MD, p. 192). The phrase "eyes as pale and unwavering as a gull's" echoes Beckett's description of his main character's eyes in Murphy,²⁷ the "old shipwreck" that Malone only vaguely remembers. Like Murphy, Sapo is based partly on Beckett: he not only has Beckett's (and Malone's) pale blue eyes, but also acts out a fictionalised version of some of Beckett's own experiences.²⁸ It is no wonder that Malone pauses to consider whether "my memories are mine" (MD, p. 226): Sapo is a composite of Beckett's memories both of his own past and of his reading.

Beckett identifies himself with Malone and Sapo at this point in the novel to illustrate the simple truth that every author writes from his own experience. Malone eventually bows to this truth, but is afraid initially that if his stories become too autobiographical, he will be dragged down into the metaphorical darkness he associates with writing about introspection. The phrase "Nothing is more real than nothing" calls to mind Murphy's efforts to attain to "Nothing"--the mystical state Schopenhauer describes in The World as Will and Idea.²⁹ In Malone's estimation, quasi-mystical introspection provides access to a reality more impressive and valuable than the reality of everyday; however, he wants to avoid writing about introspection because he knows from past experience that it is impossible to do so satisfactorily, for the reasons Beckett outlines in his dialogues with Duthuit. His stories about Saposcat amount to

a deliberate art of failure, for like the realists and naturalists Beckett heaps scorn on in "Proust," Malone is content in the Sapo episodes to "transcribe the surface, the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner" (P, p. 79). The Idea--in other words, timeless truth about inner experience--must remain prisoner because of the problems involved in writing about introspection.

At the start of the novel, Malone stresses that his stories will be calm, "almost lifeless, like the teller" (MD, p. 180). What this suggests is that his aim is to write bland fiction about unexciting characters while maintaining, as author, the detachment and objectivity we associate with the realists and naturalists. But although the Saposcats episodes are so uneventful that Malone himself remarks on their tedium, it is clear when we compare them with the realistic and naturalistic novels on which they are partly based--Balzac's Louis Lambert and Zola's La Terre³⁰--that Malone's detachment from his subject matter is minimal. Malone does not acknowledge his sources because Beckett now wants to distance himself from his narrator: he wants to suggest that the erudite Malone has forgotten ever having read the two novels, and is unaware of the irony of using them as a basis for his stories. For Balzac's novel is largely autobiographical, and Zola's derives much of its material from experience of growing up in a rural district of southern France. Both demonstrate that authors draw inevitably on their own experience, just as Malone, in spite of his efforts at detachment and objectivity, reveals much about himself in his stories, and more particularly, about the workings of his mind.

Malone makes no mention of either Balzac or Louis Lambert in his narrative. However, by assigning the peasant family that features in

it the surname "Louis" in the original French version of Malone Dies, and "Lambert" in his own English translation, Beckett hints that Balzac's novel is an unconscious source for Malone. Malone furthers this hint by unwittingly echoing phrases from Louis Lambert as he writes. Yet it is clear that rather than being a simple imitation of Balzac, the Saposcat episodes are a sour variation on Louis Lambert in the style of Malone's earliest, failed attempts at realism--his attempts to write about hunchbacks and other comic grotesques.

Malone begins by describing Sapo as a "precocious boy" (MD, p. 186), and thereby echoes Balzac, who says that Louis manifests a "précoce intelligence" (LL, p. 354)³¹ in early boyhood. But whereas Louis has by the age of five read both the Old and New Testaments, and by ten the more than two thousand books in his uncle's library, Sapo shows no interest in reading and no other signs of precocity. While other children spend the school holidays playing, Louis reads avidly; so great is his hunger for knowledge that his mother worries that his dedication to study may affect his health. Sapo, by contrast, is so hopeless at school that his parents arrange for him to have private lessons each morning during the holidays. "In the afternoon," adds Malone, "he left the house, with his books under his arm, on the pretext that he worked better in the open air . . . Once clear of the town he hid his books under a stone and ranged the countryside" (MD, p. 194).

Balzac's narrator comments that by the age of fourteen, Louis is able to articulate "facilement des idées dont la profondeur ne m'a été révélée que longtemps après" (LL, p. 355). At the same age, Malone's character shows no real signs of ability: ". . . the most striking thing about him was his big round head horrid with flaxen

hair as stiff and straight as the bristles of a brush. Even his teachers could not help thinking he had a remarkable head and they were all the more irked by their failure to get anything into it" (MD, p. 190). Unsurprisingly, Sapo comes frequently into conflict with his teachers. He is often obliged to stay after school "doing impositions" (MD, p. 189), but on the one occasion when he is threatened with the cane, Malone reports that he "snatched it from his [teacher's] hand and threw it out of the window, which was closed, for it was winter. This was enough to justify his expulsion. But Sapo was not expelled, either then or later" (MD, p. 190). Malone is troubled by this incident, for it strikes him as being an "incomprehensible indulgence" (MD, p. 190) that Sapo should have escaped punishment when he had behaved so badly, and he resolves to make his character "live as though he had been punished according to his des[s]erts" (MD, p. 190).

Significantly, Malone's vengeful attitude extends to his treatment of Sapo's parents. In contrast to Balzac, who says little more of Louis' parents than that the father runs a small tannery, he takes pains to make the Saposcats appear the most insipid imaginable petits bourgeois. Mr. Saposcat is a salesman in a shop, and draws an income so low that he sometimes speaks of finding additional part-time work. But his wife objects that this will leave no one to tend the garden; and Malone remarks that

The life of the Saposcats was full of axioms, of which one at least established the criminal absurdity of a garden without roses and with its paths and lawns uncared for. I might perhaps grow vegetables, he said. They cost less to buy, said his wife. Sapo marvelled at these conversations. Think of the price of manure, said his mother. And in the silence which followed Mr. Saposcat applied his mind, with the earnestness he brought to everything he did, to the high price of manure . . . (MD, p. 187)

"I wonder," Malone muses, "if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" (MD, p. 189). Though he wants to write about a wholly fictional character, Malone often finds himself drawing on his own experience: various hints make it clear not only that Sapo is a self-caricature, but that his parents are satirically distorted versions of Malone's own mother and father.³²

In one of his interludes, Malone reveals the underlying reason for his sudden lapse into sympathy for Sapo over the question of being expelled. He recalls that in childhood, he fitted badly into games: though he clapped his hands, ran and shouted like the other children, there were times when he suddenly became violent. "Then . . . I threw myself on the playthings, if there were any, or on a child, to change his joy to howling, or I fled, to hiding. The grown-ups pursued me, the just, caught me, beat me, hounded me back into the round, the game, the jollity. For I was already in the toils of earnestness. That has been my disease. I was born grave as others syphilitic" (MD, p. 196). Malone invests some of his own earnestness in Mr. Saposcat, but nevertheless makes it clear that his "incomprehensible indulgence" towards Sapo and sustained satiric attack on his parents are in revenge against a world that has demanded from childhood onwards that he conform to its prescriptions. In a later interlude he returns to the problem of being made to do things against his will when he comments on his photograph of an ass. "They naturally tried to make it raise its head, so that its beautiful eyes might be impressed on the celluloid, but it holds it lowered. You can tell by its ears that it is not pleased. They put a boater on its head . . . The outline is blurred, that's the

operator's giggle shaking the camera" (MD, p. 251). Like the child Malone, the ass has been made subject to someone else's idea of fun, and it acquiesces sullenly.

Sapo is similarly acquiescent: after the cane-throwing incident, Malone is careful not to embody any of his own latent aggression in a character he suspects may be partly autobiographical. His anti-social hostility finds expression in another character, Big Lambert, father of the peasant family Sapo visits one summer. Lambert is an unabashed sadist who takes pleasure both in slaughtering animals and in being cruel to his family: " . . . [he] was feared and in a position to do as he pleased. And even his young wife had abandoned all hope of bringing him to heel, by means of her cunt, that trump card of young wives. For she knew what he would do to her if she did not open it to him . . . And at the least show of rebellion on her part he would run to the wash-house and come back with the [battle] and beat her until she came round to a better way of thinking" (MD, p. 200).

Despite his name, Lambert has no counterpart in Louis Lambert. According to Deirdre Bair, he and his family are a "thinly disguised rendering" of a peasant named Bonnelly and his family, whom Beckett met in the Vaucluse during World War Two.³³ Beckett's source for these characters may be partly autobiographical; Malone's account of them suggests, however, that they derive in part from what is for him a second unconscious literary source, Zola's La Terre. The peasant world Malone describes is one of unrelenting hardship: like Zola's characters, Lambert and his family have been rendered bestial by the struggle for survival. In La Terre, drought is a major problem, the land having been parched for centuries;³⁴ similarly, the Lamberts'

farm in Malone Dies is "in summer burnt to a cinder" (MD, p. 201). Frustrated by the lack of rain, Monsieur Fouan and Jean Buteau, Malone's fictional models for Lambert, terrorise their families. Zola's Palmyre is a typical of the novel's female characters, in that she lives, as Mrs. Lambert does, the life of a "bête de somme menée à coups de fouet, morte de sommeil, le soir, à l'écurie."³⁵ Though aware that her husband has incestuous designs on their daughter, Mrs. Lambert is so worn down that she views the matter "with indifference" (MD, p. 216). In this she resembles Zola's Lise, who allows her husband to make brutal sexual advances to her sister Françoise rather than suffer them herself.

Interestingly, Malone is true to the tone of La Terre in the Lambert episodes, rather than deviating from it as he does from the tone of Louis Lambert in the earlier episodes involving Sapo alone. What this suggests is that he has greater sympathy for the sadistic Lambert than for the passive, acquiescent Saposcats. Yet in describing Lambert, he makes an effort to keep his own tendencies to violence and sadism under control. Though he says that Lambert delights in recalling to his family the squeals and struggles of the animals he is paid to slaughter, Malone is careful not to relay the details to us. Moreover, he hints at being in general more kindly, his sympathy for the ass in the photograph contrasting with Lambert's boast, at the burial of the mule, that he had bought it at the knacker's and "screwed two years" of work out of it (MD, p. 212). It is clear, however, that Malone's self-awareness is limited, for Lambert's incestuous inclinations and brutality to his wife anticipate one of Malone's fantasies in a later interlude, where he reflects on the possibility of catching "a little girl for example,

and half strangle her, three quarters, until she promises to give me my stick, give me soup, empty my pots, kiss me, fondle me, smile to me . . . [She] would undress before me, sleep beside me, have nobody but me, I would jam the bed against the door to prevent her running away" (MD, p. 273).

Malone's desire to bring another person under his control is an important influence on his writing. He knows that his body is failing, and although he says on the first page of the novel, "I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort" (MD, p. 179), he later admits that his mind is less able to control his body than he has said. In Cartesian fashion his mind give orders, but his body is unable to obey; similarly, as omniscient author of his stories, he pretends to a God-like power he lacks. As he becomes more involved in writing, he becomes correspondingly less insistent that Sapo is purely a fiction, and rejoices, midway through the novel, at having created a character "in my image" (MD, p. 226) who can be manipulated to his own ends. He can not only amuse himself by making Sapo appear a fool, but can also decree exactly what he does and when he dies. "I stop everything and wait," says Malone in a demonstration of his power. "Sapo stands on one leg, motionless, his strange eyes closed . . . The little cloud drifting before [the] glorious sun will darken the earth as long as I please" (MD, p. 194). Greater, however, than the pleasure of simply controlling Sapo is the satisfaction that accrues from thinking that Sapo depends on him completely for his existence. Triumphantly he notes that "my death and mine alone prevents him from living on, from winning, losing, joying, suffering, rotting and dying" (MD, p. 198); and he looks forward to making Sapo's death correspond with his own.

As Malone's willingness to admit that Sapo is partly autobiographical increases, so too does his uncertainty about what motivates him to write. Though he begins by stating that he is in complete control--that he is writing deliberately "in order to fail" (MD, p. 195)--he later admits to being subject to an inner obligation to write without knowing quite why the obligation exists. "All I want now," he comments near the end of the Sapo story, "is to make a last effort to understand . . . No, it is not a question of understanding. Of what then?" Like Beckett in the Duthuit dialogues, he is able only to answer "I don't know" (MD, p. 199). For a time he stops writing about Sapo, but returns to him after a long interlude more than ever prepared to confess both that his character is semi-autobiographical and that, in the act of writing, he is seeking to understand himself better. "I slip into him," Malone says, "I suppose in the hope of learning something . . . [Before] I am done I shall find traces of what was" (MD, p. 226). Despite his earlier disclaimers, Malone now hopes that by yielding to his obligation to write about a character based on himself, he will learn something about the person he once was and has since become. Implicitly he has returned to the "search for myself" (MD, p. 199)--the search that was supposed to have ended before his stories began, when he announced that he intended to write not about himself but about a fictional character as different from himself as possible.

But whether Malone wants to succeed or fail, whether he writes about his own inner experience or takes an outside view of a semi-autobiographical character, he must contend with the insoluble problem of subjectivity. Malone has enough self-awareness to be able to tell whether or not his characters resemble him, and to limit

their malevolence (in the case, for example, of Lambert) so that they do not reflect too badly on him. On the other hand, he lacks the detachment necessary to produce a wholly objective account of himself, and the insight to evaluate what he does write.

In addition, he suffers from a confusion of motives. He writes not only to know himself better, but to console himself in the face of approaching death. Though aware that his stories do nothing to alter death's inevitability, he finds consolation in the fact that they allow him both to avenge himself on those who have required him to do things against his will, and to oppose death in his imagination by assuming God-like powers of invention. He also finds comfort in the thought of taking an inventory of his possessions, for these have played a special part in his solitary life. "And but for the company of these little objects which I picked up here and there," he comments, " . . . and which sometimes gave me the impression that they too needed me, I might have been reduced to the society of nice people or to the consolations of some religion or other, but I think not" (MD, p. 248).

Though Malone wants to know himself better, his desire for self-knowledge is overshadowed in the latter part of his narrative by an urge to satirise "the society of nice people" and "the consolations of . . . religion." When after a long interlude he returns to Sapo, he makes him bizarrely Christ-like, not only by altering his name to Macmann, suggestive of "son of man," but by having him lie for a time cruciform in the rain. "The idea of punishment came to his mind," Malone comments, "addicted it is true to that chimera and probably impressed by the posture of the body and the fingers clenched as though in torment. And without knowing exactly what his sin was he

felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life, for the living" (MD, p. 239). Malone compares his character to Christ to suggest not that Macmann has been made to suffer by God for the sins of mankind, but rather that he is engaged in expiating the original sin of having been born. That the expiation of this sin (or crime) is man's lot on earth is an idea dear to both Beckett and Schopenhauer.³⁶ "Why should [birth] not be a crime," asks Schopenhauer rhetorically in The World as Will and Idea, "since, according to an eternal law, death follows upon it?" (WWI, I, 458). Like Beckett and Schopenhauer, Malone is thoroughly cynical about the existence and behaviour of God. He believes that divine punishment is no more than a "chimera," but that if (as he doubts) God does exist, He is a cruel and arbitrary figure. "There is a providence for impotent old men, to the end," he comments sourly. "And when they cannot swallow any more someone rams a tube down their gullet, or up their rectum, and fills them full of vitaminised pap, so as not to be accused of murder" (MD, p. 252).

In his story, the semi-autobiographical Macmann is conveyed to a mental hospital, the House of St. John of God's, and is subjected to the ministrations of professionally "nice people." Continuing to blend memory and fiction, Malone assigns his character an attendant named Moll, who is based partly on his own attendant, an elderly woman.³⁷ Though there is no direct acknowledgment of source, Malone is also continuing to write a distorted version of Louis Lambert, with Moll serving as a grotesque counterpart to Mlle de Villenoix,

the woman who marries Louis and looks after him throughout his final period of madness.

Prior to marrying, Louis reads widely amongst such mystics as Swedenbourg, Boehme and Mme Guyon, and formulates the theory that in some people, "l'être intérieur réussit à triompher de l'être extérieur" (LL, p. 380), with the result that they are set apart as "angels." "Pour [Louis]," Balzac's narrator comments, "l'amour pur, l'amour comme on le rêve au jeune âge, était la collision de deux natures angéliques" (LL, p. 382). Such is Louis' love for Mlle de Villenoix: his letters to her during courtship are filled with praise for "ta belle physionomie, céleste image de ton âme; l'âme, cet autre nous-même dont la forme pure, ne périssant jamais, rend alors notre amour immortel" (LL, p. 434). Unlike Louis' beloved, Moll is a "little old woman, immoderately ill-favoured of both face and body . . . The thin yellow arms contorted by some kind of bone deformation, the lips so broad and thick that they seemed to devour half the face, were at first sight her most revolting features" (MD, p. 257). Malone describes Moll's "être extérieur" in detail, but makes no mention of her "être intérieur," for her relationship with Macmann is anything but spiritual. In contrast to Louis, who is prompted by his reading of the mystics to send his lady a series of extravagantly-worded love letters, Macmann writes Moll some bizarre poetry:

Hairy Mac and Sucky Molly
In the unending days and nights
Of unending melancholy
Love it is at last unites . . .

To the lifelong promised land
Of the nearest cemetery
With his Sucky hand in hand
Love it is at last leads Hairy.

"He had time," Malone comments, "to compose ten or twelve [poems] more or less in this vein, all remarkable for their exaltation of love regarded as a kind of lethal glue, a conception frequently to be met with in mystic texts" (MD, p. 262; my italics).

Throughout their brief affair, Moll and Macmann make love grotesquely, with Macmann taking special pleasure in running his tongue over Moll's single remaining tooth, carved in the shape of a crucifix. Moll's ear-rings are also crucifixes, the three crosses representing, as she explains to Macmann, Christ flanked by the two thieves. Malone presents us with this curious example of Christian piety for the sake of suggesting that Moll's faith is misplaced. When the time comes to kill her off, he sends her, as a cruel and arbitrary God might, to a repulsive end; she dies after a period of vomiting and convulsions, and--shortly before her death--loses her one tooth. By having the tooth fall out just when its presence might have served as a source of comfort to her--as a token of the life to come--Malone suggests that religion offers nothing but illusory consolation. If God exists, He is at best indifferent to His creatures' suffering, at worst delighted to bring it about.

Macmann's next attendant, Lemuel, bears within him Malone's propensity for unreasoning violence. Though in charge of mental patients, it is clear that he himself is insane, for he is given to "stamping up and down for hours on end, gesticulating and ejaculating unintelligible words . . . And one day rolling up the leg of his trousers, he showed Macmann his shin covered with bruises, scars and abrasions. Then producing smartly a hammer from an inner pocket he dealt himself, right in the middle of his ancient wounds . . . [a] violent . . . blow" (MD, p. 267). In the light of this description

it is surprising to discover that Lemuel treats his charge humanely, and that when Macmann flees his keepers to hide in the bushes within the asylum grounds, seeks him out and huddles with him, evidently in sympathy with his feelings. What Malone wants to do is to preserve his self-caricature, Macmann/Malone, from Lemuel/Malone, the embodiment of his latent aggressiveness. This is made clear when Malone describes Macmann tearing a "branch" from a dead bramble, then having it snatched away by Lemuel, who

struck him with it over and over again, no, that won't work, then Lemuel called a keeper by the name of Pat, a thorough brute though puny in appearance, and said to him, Pat will you look at that. Then Pat snatched the stick from Macmann . . . and struck him with it until Lemuel told him to stop, and even for some little time afterwards. (MD, p. 275)

Here the responsibility for beating Macmann is assigned to another party, even though it is Lemuel who regulates the length of the beating. Malone is attacking himself in a limited way by punishing the misadventure of his self-caricature; he reserves the joy of whole-hearted violence for characters unlike himself--for his killing, for example, of the pious Moll.

Shortly before the end of the novel Malone receives a visit which prompts him to conclude his stories quickly. By all appearances, the visitor is a fiction Malone creates to describe his inner experience: the fact that he looks like "the undertaker's man, annoyed at having called prematurely," and that he deals Malone "a violent blow on the head" (MD, p. 269), suggest that he is a figurative representation of Malone's having had a stroke.³⁸ Aware in any case that death is fast approaching, Malone counsels himself "Now rest" at the end of one paragraph (MD, p. 274), and breaks off

short at the end of another, resuming with "Try and go on" (MD, p. 277).

In the last pages of the novel Malone describes an outing for some of the mental patients, sponsored by the benevolent Lady Pedal. He continues to write a blend of memory and fiction, but now, in a final burst of creativity, makes use of a wider variety of fictional sources--still without acknowledgment--than he has earlier in the novel. Evidently his failing mind is now casting about for material that will help him to understand himself better, as well as further his satiric attack on the consolations of religion and the activities of the sane. As death approaches, he begins, too, to write in a more vigorous and flamboyant style than earlier, his very colourful description of Lady Pedal standing in marked contrast to his account of, for example, the insipid Saposcats:

Lady Pedal clung to the box, her bust flung back. She was a huge, big, tall, fat woman. Artificial daisies with brilliant yellow disks gushed from her broad-brimmed straw hat. At the same time behind the heavily spotted fall-veil her plump red face appeared to pullulate. The passengers, yielding with unanimous inertia to the tilt of the seats, sprawled pell-mell beneath the box. Sit back! cried Lady Pedal. Nobody stirred . . . Are you the one in charge? said Lady Pedal. One of the sailors leaned towards Lemuel and said, She wants to know if you're the one in charge. Fuck off, said Lemuel. The Saxon uttered a roar which Lady Pedal, on the qui vive for the least sign of animation, was pleased to interpret as a manifestation of joy. That's the spirit! she cried. Sing! (MD, pp. 284-85)

Lady Pedal conforms to a literary type, for benevolent lady visitors to nineteenth and early twentieth century workhouses, charity schools and asylums abound in English fiction.³⁹ Like Thackeray's Lady Emily Hornblower, she is a writer of hymns;⁴⁰ in appearance she resembles H.G. Wells' Lady Beach-Mandarin, who is seen

at one point wearing "a black summer straw hat . . . trimmed effusively with marguerites," and who is said to be

a broad abundant billowing personality with a taste for brims, . . . loose sleeves, sweeping gestures, top notes, and the like that made her altogether less like a woman than an occasion of public rejoicing. Even her large blue eyes projected, her chin and brows and nose all seemed racing up to the front of her as if excited by the clarion notes of her abundant voice . . . She had evidently been a big, bouncing, bright gaminisque girl at fifteen, and very amusing and very much admired; she had liked the rôle and she had not so much grown older as suffered enlargement--a very considerable enlargement.⁴¹

In contrast to Wells', Malone's description contains a sense of menace, evident both in Lemuel's rude reply to the sailor, and in the refusal of the inmates to obey Lady Pedal's instructions. Malone is preparing us for his final act of revenge on the sane, a dual murder to be committed by the semi-autobiographical Lemuel. Lemuel's hatchet slaying of the two sailors reminds us that there are two sides to Malone's personality, for the comment Malone makes on their deaths is expressive both of his malevolence, as embodied in Lemuel, and of his harmless passivity, invested first in Saposcat and now in the two victims. "Two decent, quiet, harmless men," he says of the sailors, "brothers-in-law into the bargain, there are billions of such brutes" (MD, p. 287). He spares Lady Pedal's life, having her fall and break her hip rather than be murdered; yet his ambivalence towards her surfaces when he adds that "no sooner had she recovered her senses than she began to moan and groan, as if she were the only being on the face of the earth deserving of pity" (MD, p. 287).

But although it is evident to the reader that malevolence and passivity coexist in Malone, his unwitting use of a variety of fictional sources--including, in this last scene, Dostoevsky and de

Maupassant⁴²--makes it clear that his self-awareness is limited. Beckett's use of Balzac and Zola earlier in the novel was for the sake of undercutting Malone's belief that he could avoid writing about himself; his introduction of other sources at this late stage emphasises that his narrator's efforts to achieve a greater understanding of himself are limited by unconscious factors beyond his control.

On the final page the typography, set out to suggest a failing mind, indicates that Malone is about to die:

Lemuel is in charge, he raises his hatchet on which the blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, he will not hit anyone . . . any more, he will not touch anyone any more, either with it . . .

or with . . . his hammer or with his stick or with his fist or in thought in dream I mean never he will never or with his pencil or with his stick or or light light I mean never there he will never never anything there any more (MD, p. 288)

Here Lemuel becomes more and more like Malone as his hatchet gives way first to Malone's stick and then to his pencil: there can be no doubt that the murders have been at one with Malone's satiric attack on the sane. Yet the pencil in turn gives way to "light light": in spite of his early efforts to avoid exploring the darkness of his mind, Malone has ultimately tried and failed to shed light on himself through writing. His narrative has revealed that his mind is a complex mixture of violence and acquiescence, learning and ignorance; but it has revealed this to Malone just as obliquely as his earlier metaphors described his experiences of introspection. As he lies dying, Malone comes no closer to understanding either why he embodies these contradictory psychological tendencies, or how he can control

them. Once again--though without altogether meaning to--he has written a work of fiction "in order to fail."

4

In the first two novels of the trilogy Beckett presents us with three narrators who are unable to write satisfactorily about their inner experience. Molloy understands, as Moran does not, that trying to describe the mind necessarily involves using metaphors, and that, for the reasons Beckett outlines in his dialogues with Duthuit, whatever metaphors are chosen will be inadequate to the purpose. Malone tries to escape the futility of describing his introspective experience by writing about fictional characters as unlike himself as possible, but ultimately bases his art on his own life in spite of himself.

Subject, like the others, to an inexplicable obligation to express, The Unnamable's narrator returns in earnest to the task of writing about his mind. Throughout his narrative he searches deliberately but in vain for the words that will define his identity. If it were merely a case of cataloguing objective details, of writing, for example, a police-report on himself, the problem of defining his identity would soon be solved. "But my dear man," says the narrator, chiding himself in the voice of a rational being, "come, be reasonable, look, this is you, look at this photograph, and here's your file, no convictions, I assure you, come now, make an effort, at your age, to have no identity, it's a scandal, I assure you, look at this photograph . . . here, look, here's the record . . ." (U, p. 377).⁴³

The narrator never does reveal himself in such terms as these: throughout, he is simply a voice referring to himself as "I" while complaining that he is not entirely certain what that pronoun means. The "I" he is so anxious to define is his private identity--his essential being or Self. If he is to describe his Self in writing he must use the words he has learned, which refer to objects of perception; and he must employ these words in metaphors, since he wants to describe something that is not available for examination via perception. In other words, he is obliged to use public language, indirectly, to describe something inner and private. Of necessity his attempts at description will be inadequate.

This the narrator recognises all too clearly. "I seem to speak," he says in the novel's opening paragraph, "it is not I, about me, it is not about me. . . . What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later? . . . The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also [that] . . . I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never" (U, p. 291). The hopelessness of the narrator's situation is evident when he mentions the prospect of proceeding by "affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later," and also in his use of the term "aporia," for as J.D. O'Hara has noted, aporia is the scepticism that arises from awareness of opposed, irreconcilable views of a subject.⁴⁴ The narrator toys with the idea of abandoning the search for the words that say "I," of dismissing it in favour of simply jabbering "babababa" (U, p. 308), but finds that he is subject to an inner

obligation to continue the search in spite of its futility. Why this obligation exists is, as to the earlier narrators, a mystery to him. "Can it be," he asks himself, "[that] I am the prey of a genuine preoccupation, of a need to know as one might say?" Like these narrators, and like Beckett in the Duthuit dialogues, he is able only to answer "I don't know" (U, p. 294).

Initially the narrator describes himself as though he were situated at the centre of a circular chamber, "perhaps . . . the inside of my . . . skull where once I wandered, now am fixed" (U, p. 303). Various features of the chamber suggest that it depicts the "penny farthing hell"⁴⁵ that is the narrator's mind. "Hell itself," he comments, "dates from the revolt of Lucifer" (U, p. 295); the chamber dates from the beginning of the novel. At one point the narrator compares himself to Prometheus, but emphasises that, apart from being in an "infernal" situation (U, p. 395), he has nothing in common with "that miscreant who mocked the gods, invented fire, denatured clay and domesticated the horse, in a word obliged humanity . . ." (U, p. 303). The task of trying to describe the self is one the narrator undertakes for his own benefit alone.

Curiously, there are dim lights at the circumference of the skull/chamber and "people" who circle round his seat at the centre. He refers to four or five of these people as his "delegates" (U, p. 297); they are perhaps metaphors for his four or five senses. One of the delegates has "eyes like cinders" (U, p. 298) and the narrator, possibly by association with the legendary basilisk, whose look was fatal, assigns this delegate the name Basil. Basil and the others have given him "courses on love, on intelligence" (U, p. 298), and have taught him to reason and be grateful to God for the

"inestimable gift of life" that has been "rammed down [his] gullet" (U, p. 298).

But then the narrator says:

. . . there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me . . . And the lights, on which I had set such store, must they too go out? Yes, out with them, there is no light here. . . . And Basil and his gang? Inexistent, invented to explain I forget what. Ah yes, all lies . . . all invented, basely, by me alone, with the help of no one, since there is no one, to put off the hour when I must speak of me. (U, p. 304)

This metaphor for the Self and the other elements of the mind, involving a chamber and its contents, is inadequate, and the narrator discards it. Bitterly he creates new metaphors, describing himself as a ball, a cylinder and an egg--simple, familiar shapes, complete and self-contained--but rejects these descriptions too.

The chamber metaphor is of special interest in that various characters from earlier Beckett works number amongst the "people" who revolve around the narrator. "To tell the truth," he says, "I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on" (U, p. 293). The image of fictional characters orbiting a central figure recalls Jung's comment that the ego is subordinate to the Self, and may be pictured as revolving metaphorically around it "very much as the earth revolves about the sun" ("Relations," p. 238). Like the persona--the career-oriented role a man plays in everyday life--the ego is an inferior (because conscious) personality: the individual in quest of psychological truth must recognise this and concentrate on coming to a clearer understanding of the Self. Significantly, in The Unnamable, the Beckett characters orbiting the narrator in his skull/chamber are described as evasions of Self:

All these Murphys, Molloyes and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and

of me alone. . . . It is now I shall speak of me, for the first time. I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. Let them be gone now, . . . give me back the pains I lent them and vanish, from my life, my memory, my terrors and shames.
(U, pp. 303-04)

The above has every appearance of being Beckett's own explanation for making the main characters of his earlier works semi-autobiographical, and for deciding to write The Unnamable strictly about himself. What he seems to be saying is that in the past he created fictional characters and gave them his own pains to suffer, because he thought he would find comfort in "witnessing" their experiences. But now, in The Unnamable, he appears determined not to write about any further comic versions of himself; here he seems to have decided to write openly and exclusively about the pain he himself has suffered.

Further evidence of this is to be found in Deirdre Bair's biography. Bair points out not only that Beckett underwent Jungian analysis at the Tavistock Clinic in London during the thirties, but also that he wrote The Unnamable at a difficult time in his life: its subject matter, she says, "came from the depths of his being."⁴⁶ But although the novel's narrator is undoubtedly the most autobiographical of all Beckett's creations, he must not be identified too closely with Beckett, for, like Basil and the other characters the narrator ostensibly creates, he is ultimately only a "voice," a fiction. "[I]t's entirely a matter of voices," the narrator comments at one point. "[N]o other metaphor is appropriate" (U, p. 325).

Though the narrator insists early in the novel that "Basil and his gang" are "[i]nexistent, invented to explain I forget what. Ah yes, all lies" (U, p. 304), he does not reject them altogether, but chooses instead to tell stories about them. To do so, he believes, is just as valuable as to create metaphors for the Self, which are themselves necessarily fictions. He changes Basil's name to Mahood and claims that his creation has "told me stories about me" (U, p. 309), stories the narrator has confused with the "truth" about himself. He has tried to get away from these stories, but Mahood's "voice," he says, "continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine" (U, p. 309).

Significantly, writing about Mahood instead of himself gives the narrator a measure of freedom--the freedom to vent his frustration at the impossibility of his task. Returning to the image of being in a circular chamber with people orbiting round him, the narrator tells a savage story about Mahood's journey round the globe, his "world tour" (U, p. 317) and return home. In the story he deliberately speaks of himself and Mahood as though they are one person. After completing his trip the narrator/Mahood finds that his family has died of sausage-poisoning, in great agony. But merely to say this, the narrator realises, is to finish the story too quickly, without making it sufficiently savage. So he adds that he/Mahood lost a leg while travelling, and on the last part of his journey, nearing home, he describes him as hobbling in ever-decreasing circles around his dying family. He then describes "himself" limping into his house on crutches and trampling the decomposed bodies of the dead while he concludes his circular walk. "Finally I found myself, without surprise, within the building, . . . and there completed my rounds,

stamping under foot the unrecognizable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case might be, and sinking into them with the ends of my crutches, both coming and going" (U, p. 323). In his story the narrator/Mahood circles round and round and finally reaches a centre, but it is not the centre occupied by his Self, which he is no nearer to describing satisfactorily. His frustration at being unable to accomplish this task finds an outlet in his vicious description of the bodies.

His next story about himself/Mahood is equally vicious. He deprives Mahood of both legs and places him, grotesquely, in a jar. The narrator's associations here are perhaps with Keats' poem "Isabella," where the head of a dead lover is placed in a pot of basil; or perhaps with Proust, the jar being reminiscent of Proust's metaphoric vases containing "crystalline agglomeration[s]" (P, p. 73) of the Self and involuntary memory. There is a further Proustian echo in the fact that the jar is attended by a woman named Madeleine, for Proust's most famous instance of involuntary memory occurs when he dips a piece of madeleine in his tea. The narrator reflects bitterly that it may be Madeleine alone who perceives him in the jar, and he speculates that this is not perhaps sufficient proof of his "existence." "But let two third parties remark me," he says, implicitly adding an over-anxious proviso to Berkeley's dictum, "esse est percipi," "and I'll take care of the rest" (U, p. 342)—that is, he will begin to "exist."

Mahood then gives way to Worm, born of the narrator/Mahood's refusal to attribute to man the status of higher mammal: "Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal. I couldn't" (U, p. 337). At first Worm has no human characteristics, though eventually

the narrator reluctantly assigns him sight and hearing. But when he sees Worm thus becoming "humanized" (U, p. 360), he abandons him because he fears that he might begin to identify with him. Mahood and Worm are mere surrogates for the Self, which the narrator recognises to be indescribable. When he tires of them the narrator considers creating another fiction, "his head splitting with vile certainties" (U, p. 392), who would be a bitter mockery of the narrator's uncertainty about a variety of philosophical issues. But then he abandons this idea in favour of a last frenzied attempt to describe his Self.

Worm and Mahood are brought into existence by a narrator all too aware of the futility of the task before him. His narrative is expressive "of its impossibility, of its obligation" (TD, p. 145), and Beckett ensures that his situation is that of the ideal artist in the Duthuit dialogues. Though the narrator feels "obliged to speak" (U, p. 291), he would dearly love to be silent, and toys initially with the idea that his obligation to write is a pensum, which once discharged will free him from ever having to speak again:

I don't mind failing . . . but I want to go silent. . . . Then it would be a life worth having, a life at last. My speech-parched voice at rest would fill with spittle, I'd let it flow over and over, happy at last, dribbling with life, my pensum ended, in the silence. . . . Yes, I have a pensum to discharge, before I can be free, free to dribble, free to speak no more . . . There at last is a fair picture of my situation. I was given a pensum, at birth perhaps, as a punishment for having been born perhaps, or for no particular reason . . . and I've forgotten what it is. (U, p. 310)

But shortly afterwards he admits that the pensum is a mere fiction:

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it, before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, before I can be done with speaking, . . . I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere

on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. . . . I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of other, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact. (U, p. 314)

Even if the pensum is a fiction, the obligation to express remains.

A limited freedom exists within that obligation in the sense that the narrator need not speak about his Self, but can turn his attention instead to surrogates like Mahood and Worm. But, as in Molloy and Malone Dies, these fictions must derive from the narrator's own experience--either his actual experience or his reading. The flight from Self into fiction is therefore a spurious freedom, like the freedom of walking eastward on a westbound boat. That image, from Geulincx, appears in the first part of Molloy: "I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit" (M, p. 51). The image arises again in The Unnamable in a less explicit form: "I. Who might that be? The galley-man, bound for the Pillars of Hercules, who drops his sweep under cover of night and crawls between the thwarts, towards the rising sun, unseen by the guard, praying for storm" (U, p. 336). Originally, in Geulincx, the image is used to suggest the mind's impotence to effect changes in the world at large: there is no point in praying for storm, Geulincx held, if God has decreed that it is to be a fine day.⁴⁷ In Molloy and The Unnamable, on the other hand, the image suggests the futility of trying to escape from oneself through fictions.

The narrator's greatest problem in both novels is that of coping with the inadequacy of language. The Unnamable's narrator says he has "no words but the words of others" (U, p. 314); these he has learned from his delegates, and he sees them set out like the pages of an illustrated dictionary: ". . . I use them all, all the words they showed me, there were columns of them, . . . they were on lists, with images opposite . . ." (U, p. 407). His situation is that of a parrot repeating words he has been taught in fulfilment of a task for which they are inappropriate. In a more frenzied passage he describes himself as being like "a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage and then dead in a cage, in a word like a beast, in one of their words, like such a beast" (U, pp. 386-87).

The narrator's bitterness gathers, and he speaks of cursing his delegates because their words prevent him from uttering the truth about his identity:

. . . I'll curse them yet, they'll know what it is to be a subject of conversation, I'll impute words to them you wouldn't throw to a dog, an ear, a mouth and in the middle a few rags of mind, I'll get my own back . . . I'll let down my trousers and shit stories on them, stories, photographs, records . . . observing the while, Be born, dear friends, be born, enter my arse, you'll just love my colic pains, it won't take long, I've the bloody flux. (U, p. 380)

He speaks of "gaps" (U, p. 369) in the babble his voice makes, and hopes against hope that if he can utter the right words these small silences will give way to a permanent silence, the "real silence" (U, p. 408) in which he is no longer obliged to speak because he has finally defined his identity. Indeed, he devotes the last thirty pages of the novel to trying to find the word or words that will

adequately "say I" (U, p. 291). The pace of his narrative accelerates as he vainly pushes forward to an unattainable conclusion. The impossibility of completing his task, the frenzy with which he would like to complete it, would like to arrive at the figurative door opening onto the "story" that will allow him to be silent are nowhere more apparent than in the final lines of the novel:

. . . you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (U, p. 414)

In the second part of Molloy Moran believes that it is possible to write adequately about his introspective experience; in the first part of that novel, Molloy is sceptical, but continues to write about his mind nevertheless. Malone Dies makes it clear that the task of defining the Self is impossible and that ultimately Malone's consoling fictions can do nothing to alter the inevitability of death. Yet in Malone Dies there is a sense of release, the release of dying and being rid for ever of the obligation to search for psychological truth. In The Unnamable, by contrast, there is no such relief. The narrator must go on indefinitely and is only halted through the intervention of Samuel Beckett: there is a terrifying sense that if Beckett had not stopped the narrative where he does, it would continue into eternity. In essence The Unnamable is a vision of hell, the hell of being tormented by one's own thoughts and especially by the thought that the Self can never be defined. The

narrator's comment in the opening lines, "Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on" (U, p. 291) suggests that he has been struggling with the problem for some time: there is no doubt that the narrative ends with his determination to continue struggling with it indefinitely. Subject to an obligation to express, yet knowing that there is "nothing to express . . .," the narrator of The Unnamable concludes Beckett's trilogy of novels in the most appropriate possible way.

NOTES

¹All quotations from Beckett's "Three Dialogues" are from Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation TD. As Deirdre Bair points out Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 393, Beckett wrote the dialogues himself, basing them on conversations held with Duthuit in 1949. They first appeared as "Three Dialogues," in Transition Forty-Nine, 5 ([Dec.] 1949), 97-103.

²Beckett (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 4.

³The Long Sonata of the Dead (London: Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 38.

⁴The Shape of Chaos (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 7. Again, in Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), p. 195, Edith Kern uses Coe's reading of the dialogues as a basis to argue that, for Beckett, artistic failure is "a realisation of the artist's essential paradox, of the fact that the writer's pour-soi turns all it reveals into an en-soi."

⁵For a discussion of the term "coenaesthesia" (or "coenaesthesia") see John Herbert Parsons, An Introduction to the Theory of Perception (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp. 10-11 and 31-41.

⁶What the experimental psychologists found is that "experienced perceptual wholes tend toward the greatest regularity, simplicity, and clarity possible under the given conditions." (Solomon E. Asch, "Gestalt Theory," in The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (London: MacMillan & the Free Press, 1968), VI, 168). Since each individual perception is a simplification of the available sense-data, it follows that our view of the world is a cumulative simplification of its infinite available data.

⁷In The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 60-61, 66, 68, Richard L. Admussen reveals that all three novels were first written in French--Molloy from 2 May 1947 to 1 November 1947, Malone meurt from 27 November 1947 to 30 May 1948, and L'Innomable from 29 March 1949 to January 1950.

⁸Beckett's interest in the Pythagoreans was first remarked on by Hugh Kenner in Samuel Beckett: a Critical Study (London: John Calder, 1962), p. 32. Kenner makes no mention, however, of Beckett's related interest in experimental psychology.

⁹All quotations from the English Molloy are from Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/Malone Dies/The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1965). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation M.

¹⁰A la recherche du temps perdu, III, 879. All quotations from this work are from the Gallimard edition (Paris, 1954), in three volumes. Page and volume numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation R. I have translated brief phrases from the novel for the sake of clarity; longer passages appear in the original French.

¹¹C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 204. Hereafter cited in the text as "Relations." Beckett would have read this work in the original German, as Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewussten (Zurich, 1945). Bair points out, pp. 177-78, that Beckett's interest in Jung dates from the early thirties, when he underwent Jungian analysis at the Tavistock Clinic in London. He was becoming proficient in German at this time.

¹²See "Marriage as a Psychological Relationship," in The Development of Personality, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 190. (First published as "Die Ehe als psychologische Beziehung," in Das Ehebuch [Celle, 1925]).

¹³There is further evidence of this on p. 59, where Molloy says that when his mother's image mingles with images of other women in his mind, it is "literally unendurable, like being crucified, I don't know why and I don't want to."

¹⁴Molloy (Paris: Minuit, 1951), p. 96.

¹⁵Samuel Beckett: a New Approach (London: Dent, 1970), p. 32. No single psychological theory is sufficient to account for all the complexities of the two narratives. Nevertheless, Molloy and (as we shall see) Moran each provide us with all the materials for a Jungian interpretation of a substantial proportion of their narratives; each is blinded to the applicability of Jungian theory, however, by his own subjectivity.

¹⁶C.G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, trans. Stanley Dell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940), p. 20. In Samuel Beckett: a Study of His Novels (London: Peter Owens, 1970), pp. 89-90, Eugene Webb refers in passing to Jung in commenting that Molloy is, psychologically, Moran's direct opposite. He does not develop this comment in detail, however.

¹⁷The passage in question is R, I 666.

¹⁸Bair, p. 136.

¹⁹As various critics have pointed out, the fact that most of Beckett's protagonists have names beginning with "M" suggests that they are meant to be aspects of "me" or "moi"—that is, of Beckett himself. Molloy has been away from his "part of the world" (M, p. 17) for some time, and is aware of being out of touch with changes there. Similarly, by the time he began Molloy in 1947, Beckett had been living in France for ten years; he visited his mother

regularly, except during the war. Bair reveals that Beckett had a troubled relationship with her--just as Molloy has with his mother. In referring to his narrative as part of a trilogy of novels (M, p. 8), Molloy suggests that he and Beckett are one. Similarly, Moran speaks as though he were Beckett of the "rabble in my head. . . . Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others" (M, p. 137); all but one are characters in Beckett's previous fiction. Yerk is the one exception: "he" is a figment in the mind of Belacqua, another partly autobiographical character, as he dies on the operating table in More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 186: "[his] heart was running away, terrible yellow yerks in his skull."

²⁰Gabriel d'Aubarède, "En attendant . . . Beckett," Nouvelles Littéraires, 16 February 1961, 7.

²¹All quotations from Malone Dies are from Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/Malone Dies/The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1965). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation MD.

²²Malone's comment about "shapelessness and speechlessness" echoes Molloy's observation that writing is "senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (M, p. 13). His reference to "incurious wondering" recalls Molloy's description of himself as an "incurious seeker" (M, p. 64).

²³For an example of Malone's scepticism about the content of certain mystic texts, see See MD, p. 262, where he speaks of love being regarded by various mystics as "a kind of lethal glue." For an account of finding God within that is similar to Malone's (MD, p. 195, quoted above), see, for example, St. John of the Cross's poem, "Stanzas of the Soul," in which union with God is described as follows: "Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!/ Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,/ There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, and the fanning the cedars made a breeze." (Quoted from The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1953), I, 326).

²⁴See "Relations," pp. 219, 224 and 236.

²⁵See "Relations," p. 175.

²⁶See MD, p. 206.

²⁷See Mu, p. 5, where Murphy's eyes are said to be "cold and unwavering as a gull's."

²⁸For parallels between Beckett's childhood and Saposcat's, see Bair, pp. 11, 25, and 28-30.

²⁹Though the phrase "Nothing is more real than nothing" originates with Democritus (see Edward Hussey, The Presocratics (London: Duckworth, 1972), p. 143), it is used in both Murphy and Malone Dies to convey that no reality is more impressive and valuable

than the reality of the mystical experience--the experience, in Schopenhauer's terms, of "Nothing" (WWI, I, 531-32).

³⁰Ruby Cohn was the first critic to point out that Louis Lambert might be a source for Malone Dies. In Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 132, she draws attention to this possibility in relating the fact that Malone's peasant characters, the Lamberts, are called the Louis in Malone meurt, the original French version of Malone Dies. Cohn comments that "no one is less like the nineteenth-century realist's precocious passionate youth than Beckett's brutal peasant pig-butcher [Lambert]"; she does not see that Balzac is an important source for the parts of the Sapo story unconcerned with this character. No one has as yet suggested La Terre as a source for Malone Dies; I am grateful to my colleague, Peter Tremewan, for raising this possibility with me.

³¹All quotations from Louis Lambert (1832) are from La Comédie Humaine (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), X; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation LL. John Ryan cites an interesting case of the unconscious use of a source in real life in "The Two Pincher Martins: from Survival Adventure to Golding's Myth of Dying," English Studies, 55 (April 1974), 140-51. Ryan stumbled on a boy's adventure book published in 1916, entitled Pincher Martin, O.D. A Story of the Inner Life of the Royal Navy, and, noting a number of echoes of it in William Golding's novel, Pincher Martin (1956), wrote to ask Golding if he had deliberately used it as a source. Golding replied that he "probably . . . read it at some time or other. I don't remember the book at all, however" (144).

³²Late in the novel, Malone says of another character, Lemuel, that "he was born, in a fine house, of loving parents . . . [Near the house] the hammers of the stone-cutters [rang] all day like bells" (MD, p. 286). Since this passage, with its mention of the stone-cutters, echoes the interlude in which Malone reveals that he grew up in a house in the country, near where "the stone-cutters lived, like generations of stone-cutters before them" (MD, p. 206), it is clearly being suggested that Lemuel is a semi-autobiographical figure who, like Malone (and Beckett too), grew up in a prosperous semi-rural home. (For a description of Cooldrinagh, Beckett's childhood home, see Bair, pp. 9-24 and passim).

³³Bair, p. 376.

³⁴See Emile Zola, La Terre (Paris: Charpentier, 1887), p. 364.

³⁵Ibid., p. 136.

³⁶Two of Beckett's favourite lines of verse are: "The greatest crime [or sin] of man/ Is that he ever was born." The lines, from Calderon's La Vida es Sueno (I.ii.111-12), are quoted in several places in The World as Will and Idea (I, 328 and 458; III, 420), for they were also favourites of Schopenhauer's. Beckett cites them in the original Spanish in "Proust" (p. 67), and echoes them in various of his novels and plays.

³⁷Early in the novel, Malone speaks of having had a female attendant: "The woman came right into the room, bustled about, enquired about my needs, my wants" (MD, p. 185). Later he says "I used to see an old woman, then for a time an old yellow arm, then for a time an old yellow hand" (MD, p. 253). He echoes this description in commenting that Moll has "thin yellow arms" (MD, p. 257).

³⁸Various critics have drawn attention to the visitor's resemblance to the undertaker's man who gives the title to "Malacoda," one of the poems in Beckett's 1935 collection, Echo's Bones. "Malacoda" has been reprinted in Samuel Beckett, Poems in English (London: Calder, 1961), p. 35.

³⁹See Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: a Changing Ideal, 1837-73 (London: Oxford U.P., 1956), pp. 13-30.

⁴⁰Lady Emily Hornblower (née Lady Emily Southdown) is a minor character in Thackeray's Vanity Fair, who is said to be a writer of hymns. The hymn Lady Pedal sings (MD, p. 285) is evidently one she herself has composed, for it is not to be found in any of the standard hymn books. Beckett may well have chosen her name for its association with organ pedals.

⁴¹"The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman" (1914); rpt. in H.G. Wells, Stories of Men and Women in Love (London: Hutchinson, 1933), pp. 456-57. Malone also echoes Wells earlier in the novel when he says that "I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness . . . long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding. Such is the earnestness from which, for nearly a century now, I have never been able to depart" (MD, p. 180). This passage recalls George Ponderevo's comment in Tono-Bungay that "There's no humour in my blood. I'm in earnest in warp and woof. I stumble and flounder, but I know that . . . there . . . are things that are great and serene, very high, beautiful things--the reality" (H.G. Wells, Tono-Bungay (1909; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 165).

⁴²The hatchet murders in Malone Dies may derive from Crime and Punishment, which contains a famous double axe murder. Yet the fact that one of the sailors in Malone Dies is killed while sitting on a stone filling his pipe calls to mind the slaying of a Prussian soldier in de Maupassant's story, "Le Père Milon," as described by Milon himself: "V'là qu' j'en aperçois un . . . [cavalier] qui fumait sa pipe su mon fossé derrière ma grange. J'allai décrocher ma faux et je r'vins à p'tits pas par derrière, qu'il n'entendit seulement rien. Et j'li coupai la tête d'un coup, d'un seul, comme un épi, qu'il n'a pas seulement dit 'ouf.'" (Guy de Maupassant, "Le Père Milon," in Oeuvres complètes (1899; rpt. Paris: Louis Conard, 1929), XXVIII, 5).

⁴³All quotations from The Unnamable are from Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/Malone Dies/The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1965). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation U.

⁴⁴See J.D. O'Hara, "About Structure in Malone Dies," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 67.

⁴⁵Eh Joe, in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 202.

⁴⁶Bair, p. 402. Bair discusses Beckett's time at the Tavistock Clinic in Chapter Eight of her biography.

⁴⁷I am indebted to Ruby Cohn ("Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett," in Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 171-72), for commenting on the philosophical significance of the relevant passage in Geulincx and its relationship to the trilogy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FIRST PLAYS FOR THE STAGE

1

Asked in an interview with Israel Shenker in 1956 why, after twenty years as a novelist and essayist, he decided to write Waiting for Godot, Beckett replied: "I didn't choose to write a play. . . . It just happened like that."¹ To other people, however, Beckett has spoken of having had more definite reasons for changing genres. In 1972 he told Deirdre Bair that "I turned to writing plays to relieve myself of the awful depression the prose led me into . . . Life [in the late forties] was too demanding, too terrible, and I thought theater would be a diversion."² On another occasion he remarked to Colin Duckworth, similarly, that he "began to write Godot as a relaxation, to get away from the awful prose I was writing at that time."³ At the time--in mid-1948, between Malone Meurt and L'Innommable--Beckett had reached an impasse in his fiction,⁴ and was drawn to drama by a "need to create for a smaller space, one in which I had some control of where people stood or moved, above all in a certain light."⁵

Though Beckett sometimes speaks of Godot as though it were his first play, in fact it was preceded by three others. The earliest of these, "Le Kid," written in French with Georges Pelorson for performance by the Trinity College Modern Language Society in early 1931, was a clumsy student parody of Corneille's Le Cid.⁶ "Le Kid"

was followed some six years later by Human Wishes, which was to have dealt at length with Dr. Johnson's relationship with Mrs. Thrale, but which Beckett abandoned unfinished.⁷ Deirdre Bair has suggested that he chose to write about Dr. Johnson because he saw in "the Great Cham" a man whose tendency to melancholy was similar to his own, and it may be that Beckett failed to complete it because he became too emotionally involved with his subject.⁸ His next play, "Eleuthéria," written in 1947, is also personal: as James Knowlson has shown, it is a thinly-veiled account of Beckett's relationship with his family as a young man.⁹ "Eleuthéria" is of interest in that it anticipates Beckett's subsequent drama in certain minor ways;¹⁰ yet in general it does not proceed in "la même direction" (to use Beckett's own words) as either the fiction he wrote before it or the plays he wrote after it.¹¹ Where "Eleuthéria" and Human Wishes focus on largely personal issues, most of Beckett's subsequent drama is, like his early fiction, concerned with the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

2

"During a conversation in 1956," the Irish critic Alec Reid reports, "[Beckett] made [a] very illuminating remark to the effect that the great success of Waiting for Godot had arisen from a misunderstanding; critics and public alike, he said, were seeking to impose an allegorical or symbolic explanation on a play which was striving all the time to avoid definition."¹² Godot strives at all times to avoid definition because it is meant to reflect the infinite complexity of the world at large: Beckett's artistic practice in the

play is in this respect entirely consistent with both the theory and practice of his early fiction. In order not to diminish its complexity, he has consistently refused to comment on any major questions of interpretation.¹³ When Alan Schneider, the first American director of Waiting for Godot, once asked, "Who or what does Godot mean?", Beckett replied: "If I knew, I would have said so in the play."¹⁴ He told Harold Hobson, similarly, that "If Godot were God, I would have called him that," and he has often answered other questions about his work with a terse "I meant what I said."¹⁵

It may seem odd that Beckett chose to define more narrowly the play that strives at all times to avoid definition by altering its subtitle from "pièce en deux actes," to "a tragicomedy in two acts" when he translated it from French into English.¹⁶ Yet the transition from "play" to "tragicomedy" makes for only a slight narrowing, given that there is, as Richard Dutton has observed,

no single, agreed definition of 'tragicomedy.' Nor, unlike 'tragedy' and 'comedy,' has there been a consistent historical tradition of tragicomedy within which we can look for a definition. Writers like Guarini and Fletcher in the Renaissance, and Brecht, Artaud and Pirandello in more recent times, have all claimed to write 'tragicomedies,' but it [is far] from obvious that there is any common thread running through these claims or that their definitions have common points of departure. . . . As a result, 'tragicomedy' has become one of the most contentious of all critical terms. One can imagine Beckett, always the most scrupulous word-smith, smiling wryly as he used it.¹⁷

While it is possible that Beckett chose to subtitle the English Godot a tragicomedy simply to tease the reader, a note he sent Roger Blin, director of the first production of the French version, suggests that there were other, more important reasons for the change--reasons that

are ultimately linked to his interest in the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

Beckett stayed away from the opening night of Blin's production, but was horrified to learn the next day that the actor playing Estragon dropped his trousers only as far as his hips at the end of the play.¹⁸ In his note to Blin, he said:

One thing troubles me, the pants of Estragon. I naturally asked Suzanne [Dumesnil, later his wife] if [they] fell well, and she told me that he keeps them half on. He mustn't. He absolutely mustn't. It doesn't suit the circumstances. . . . As for the laughter, which could greet their complete fall, there is nothing to object to in the great gift of this touching final tableau; it would be of the same order as the preceding scenes. The spirit of the play, to the extent to which it has one, is that nothing is more grotesque than the tragic. One must express it up to the end, and especially at the end. . . . [For the pants to fall completely around the ankles] might seem stupid to you but for me it's capital.¹⁹

The fact that Beckett wrote this note before he translated Godot into English suggests that he had at least one straightforward reason for referring to the English version as a tragicomedy: he wanted to make it clear that Godot is neither a tragedy nor a comedy but a careful blend of the two.²⁰ Evidently he was aware that a wholly tragic play might imply the existence outside it of a settled, traditional world of gods, kings, heroes and villains--of metaphysical, social and ethical certainty; and that a wholly comic play might evoke an optimistic world oblivious of the inescapable uncertainty attendant on the limits of human knowledge. A blend of the comic and tragic could, on the other hand, convey something of the anguish of our uncertainty about the nature of the world at large, and of our need to palliate that anguish through comedy.

How much comedy a production of Godot should contain has always been a matter of concern to Beckett. Though insistent that

Estragon's trousers should fall comically to the ground, he (Beckett) was opposed to Blin's early suggestion that the play should be staged as a circus, and was relieved when he abandoned the idea.²¹ Colin Duckworth has noted that Beckett disliked Peter Hall's 1955 production of Godot because it laid "too much stress . . . on the farce and not enough on the tragic quality." When Beckett supervised the 1964-65 production by Anthony Page at the Royal Court Theatre, London, says Duckworth, "[t]hese two qualities were balanced with exquisite perfection."²²

Another reason the English Godot announces itself as a blend of tragedy and comedy is to indicate that in conventional terms it is neither; it is instead an original modern play.²³ The extent of Beckett's departure from convention in Godot becomes clear when we examine it in the light of Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the Poetics--a definition that has influenced the theory and practice of tragedy over many centuries. Tragedy, says Aristotle, is

an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced by each of the kinds of linguistic adornment, applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents. I mean by 'language that has been artistically enhanced,' that which is accompanied by rhythm and harmony and song; and by the phrase 'each of the kinds of linguistic adornment applied separately in the various parts of the play,' I mean that some parts are accomplished by meter alone and others, in turn, through song.²⁴

Waiting for Godot conforms to this definition in a number of obvious respects. It is "in dramatic, not narrative form," and contains a small amount of song at the beginning of Act II. The dialogue is not, however, written in meter, and while the play as a whole may well be "an imitation of [an] . . . action" in Aristotelian terms, it

is clearly not a naturalistic play in the modern sense--that is to say, a play that seeks to create the illusion that its characters are real people enacting real events.²⁵ Instead of presenting us with a wealth of detail about the setting and characters, as a conventional naturalistic dramatist would, Beckett takes care to tell us the absolute minimum--and much of what he does tell us is either vague or self-contradictory. He creates a sense of uncertainty rather than of reality in Godot for the sake of implying that the conclusions we reach about the play can be no more certain than those we form about the infinitely complex world around us.

Thus, we learn little more about the setting of the play than that it is "A country road" (WG, p. [7]). The fact that Vladimir and Estragon refer to the Eiffel Tower (WG, p. 10) and the Rhône (WG, p. 53) suggests that the road may be somewhere in France; on the other hand, Lucky's allusions to Fulham, Clapham and Connemara (WG, p. 44) in the course of his "think" imply that the setting is either England or Ireland. The time of year in which the action takes place is made no clearer: Pozzo remarks in the first act that there is a "[t]ouch of autumn in the air this evening" (WG, p. 24), and Estragon in the second that "[i]t must be the Spring" (WG, p. 66); yet the stage directions tell us that Act II takes place "Next Day. Same Time. Same Place" (WG, p. 55). In the first act Vladimir comments that "Time has stopped" (WG, p. 36), and twice in the second, Estragon tells him that he must have "dreamt" (WG, pp. 61, 90) the events he claims to remember. Our sense that we are observing the events of a dream is enhanced when Pozzo wonders aloud in Act II whether he is awake or asleep;²⁶ however, whether the dream is Vladimir's, Pozzo's or some combination of the two is never specified.

Beckett tells us as little about his characters as he does about the setting and the nature of the events in his play. We learn next to nothing about their past, their families, or their occupations--subjects a naturalistic playwright might well dwell on in detail. Even their names are uncertain: Estragon says his is "Adam" (WG, p. 37) when Pozzo asks it of him, and Vladimir answers to "Mister Albert" (WG, pp. 49, 91) at the end of each act when he is approached by a small boy with a message from Godot. The names Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky suggest that each character is of a different nationality; yet as various critics have shown, they also suggest that the characters can be associated with a bewildering variety of literary works and historical events.²⁷

One thing that is certain about the characters is that none conforms to Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero, for the presence of a conventional hero in Godot would imply a settled hierarchy of values both in the play and the world at large. In Chapter XIV of the Poetics, Aristotle says that such a hero is "neither perfect in virtue and justice, nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity; but rather, one who succumbs through some miscalculation. He must also be a person who enjoys great reputation and good fortune, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and other illustrious men from similar families."²⁸ The wealthy Pozzo is the only one of the play's characters who can be said to be of "good fortune"; but whether he is also of "great reputation" is less clear. He is surprised to find on first meeting Vladimir and Estragon that they have never heard of him; if, in spite of this, he is well known, it must surely be for cruelty to his servants. "I am perhaps not particularly human," says Pozzo in Act I, just before

announcing his plan to sell Lucky at the local fair, "but who cares?" (WG, p. 29). The remaining characters are no more "human"--that is to say, humane--than Pozzo: Lucky is an intermittently violent madman, and Vladimir and Estragon show no sustained concern for either of the others--even when, in Act II, blind and in distress, Pozzo calls for help.

Some years after the publication of Godot, Arthur Miller was to argue that a perfectly ordinary man--the corner grocer, for example--can be a modern tragic hero, "providing, of course, that the grocer's career engages [such major] issues [as], for instance, the survival of the race, [and] the relationships of man to God . . ."²⁹ While it might be difficult to say which of Godot's characters is the tragic hero in Miller's sense (since three of them--Vladimir, Estragon and Lucky--are all, like the corner grocer, ordinary men), it is nevertheless clear that the play addresses itself to major questions. Central to Godot are the question of the limits of human knowledge and the related question as to whether God exists and is benevolently disposed to man.

The two questions come together near the end of the second act in Pozzo's comment that "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (WG, p. 89). What Pozzo is saying is that the individual human life is no more than a glimmer in the vast dark of eternity--and in saying it, he is echoing the opening verses of Ecclesiastes.³⁰ "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, . . . all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever."³¹ In the context of eternity, the Preacher stresses, the

individual human life is vain, trivial and meaningless. Yet in later verses he says that we can derive cheer from the existence of God, for God takes pleasure in human striving and thereby confers meaning and purpose on it.³²

Later in Act II, Vladimir proposes a variation on Pozzo's statement: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. . . . But habit is a great deadener" (WG, pp. 90-91). Vladimir's view is that, for the individual concerned, the traditional three score and ten is a very long time, and a time of suffering at that. It is habit--not just routine, but more generally the psychological mechanism Beckett describes in his essay on Proust--that acts to limit our suffering, rather than God.

Evidently, both Vladimir and Estragon have lost faith in God, and are now hopeful that their lives might be given meaning by a figure they have come to regard as a surrogate deity, Godot.³³ To Godot they have addressed "A kind of prayer. A vague supplication," and he has replied

ESTRAGON: That he couldn't promise anything.
 VLADIMIR: That he'd have to think it over.
 ESTRAGON: In the quiet of his home.
 VLADIMIR: Consult his family.
 ESTRAGON: His friends.
 VLADIMIR: His agents.
 ESTRAGON: His correspondents.
 VLADIMIR: His books.
 ESTRAGON: His bank account.
 VLADIMIR: Before taking a decision. (WG, p. 18)

Though it is never made clear why Vladimir and Estragon place their faith in Godot rather than God, it may be that they share Lucky's scepticism about God's existence and benevolence, as expressed in his

"think." Excised of digressions and superfluous detail, Lucky's tirade yields the following:

Given the existence . . . of a personal God . . . with white beard . . . outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly . . . it is established beyond all doubt that . . . man in brief . . . is seen to waste and pine . . . (WG, pp. 42-43)

If there is a personal God who loves His creatures, Lucky is saying, He has made little effort to make His existence and love evident to us. Apparently He suffers from "apathia (insensibility to suffering), athambia (imperturbability) and aphasia (inability to understand or use speech--i.e., to hear prayers and supplications or to communicate with man)." ³⁴ In the absence of absolutely certain evidence of God's existence, man wastes away unto death, pining for meaning in a world that is, as in the opening verses of Ecclesiastes, essentially meaningless. From the play in general rather than Lucky's "think" in particular it emerges that the temptation to seek meaning and purpose in a surrogate deity--a Godot--is strong.

Yet there is no guarantee whatsoever that Godot either can or will serve as a satisfactory substitute for God. Whether Godot has the power to save Vladimir and Estragon from a meaningless life is not clear; nor is it clear whether he would save them if he could. Early in the play, Vladimir calls attention to the story of the two thieves crucified with Christ, one of whom was saved and the other damned. Godot may behave as Christ did, and come to the aid of Vladimir but not Estragon, or vice-versa; alternatively, he may not help either of them. The messenger who appears at the end of each act to say that Mr. Godot cannot come this evening but will surely come tomorrow has a counterpart in Oedipus Rex in the messenger who unwittingly forces upon Oedipus the recognition that he is guilty of

patricide and incest. But in Waiting for Godot, Vladimir and Estragon do not see, as Oedipus does, that they have made a great mistake, and--to return to Aristotle's comments about the tragic hero--that they have fallen into "misfortune." They do not see that they have made a mistake because they may not have made one: it is impossible to be certain either that they are wrong to have lost faith in God, or that they have fallen into misfortune by relying on Godot to redeem their lives from meaninglessness. However doubtful it seems, Godot may still arrive and substantially alter their situation: it is with this in mind that Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait for him at the end of the play.

Vladimir's references to the two thieves crucified with Christ are of special interest in light of a comment Beckett made to Harold Hobson in 1956. When Hobson asked why, as a nonbeliever, he had included such references in the play, Beckett replied: "'I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned." That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.'"³⁵ Godot mirrors the antithetical shape of the sentence from Augustine in a number of ways. The play is in two acts, and presents two characters awaiting the arrival of the mysterious Godot. The fact that the English version of the play is subtitled "a tragicomedy in two acts" is an invitation to us to ponder the possible tragedy of the characters' situation and the comedy of their response to it.

For it is clear that Vladimir and Estragon are largely comic figures. In the Poetics, Aristotle says that

comedy is an imitation of baser men. These are characterised not by every kind of vice but specifically by 'the ridiculous,' which is a subdivision of the category of 'deformity.' What we mean by 'the ridiculous' is some error or ugliness that is painless and has no harmful effects. The example that comes immediately to mind is the comic mask, which is ugly and distorted but causes no pain.³⁶

The "error" Vladimir and Estragon commit in, for example, placing Lucky's hat on his head causes no one any physical harm or pain: it simply means that they expose themselves and the other characters on stage to an incoherent harangue that can be stopped, comically, by removing the hat. Similarly, we laugh at the "ugliness" of Vladimir's stinking breath and Estragon's stinking feet because it is that of two characters who are modelled partly on clowns, partly on music hall comedians, and partly on cinema comics like Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers.³⁷

Nevertheless, we cannot help but be troubled at the psychological pain that clearly lies behind Lucky's tirade--the pain of a man apparently driven mad by the thought that man "wastes and pines" in a meaningless world. Moreover, we are moved to pity Vladimir and Estragon their fruitless wait for Godot and to fear that it will forever be in vain. Pity and fear are, of course, the emotions that are so important to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, for as we have seen, tragedy "achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents." As O.B. Hardison and other commentators have shown, "catharsis" can mean either "clarification" or "purgation":

we not only learn from the cathartic experience, but are emotionally cleansed or healed by it.³⁸

The idea of being healed by tragedy is of special interest when we remember that Beckett greatly admired the work of Antonin Artaud at the time he wrote Godot.³⁹ In "The Theater and Cruelty," Artaud speaks of the a need for a theatre that would "recover from the cinema, the music hall, the circus, and from life itself what has always belonged to it": the power to act upon us "like a spiritual therapeutics whose touch can never be forgotten."⁴⁰ This is perhaps the underlying reason for the comic element in Godot: not only to create in us a sense of pity and fear for characters who find themselves in a meaningless world, but to invite us to keep morbidity at bay, as they do, by laughing at their predicament. For, as Arsene says in Watt, "the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, . . . [is] the laugh that laughs . . . at that which is unhappy."⁴¹ It is the risus purus because it is laughter that arises from an awareness that life in the modern world is pervaded by epistemological, metaphysical and moral uncertainty--the inescapable product of the limits of human knowledge.

3

In Samuel Beckett: a Biography, Deirdre Bair reveals that, shortly after he had completed the original French version of his next play, Endgame (Fin de partie), in 1957, Beckett mentioned the play to friends and corrected them when they translated the title as "End of the game." "No," she quotes him as emphasising, "[it] is Endgame, as in chess."⁴²

This comment of Beckett's, unknown to most critics until recently, serves as retrospective justification for the many articles and book chapters written in the past twenty years claiming that Endgame is, in effect, the last part of an on-stage game of chess. In general, their authors agree that Hamm should be viewed as a king threatened by checkmate, Clov as a knight, and Nagg and Nell as either rooks or pawns. Disagreement arises only over the identity of the side seeking to checkmate Hamm. On the basis that Hamm and Clov have "very red" (E, pp. 11, 12) faces,⁴³ while Nagg's and Nell's are "very white" (E, pp. 15, 18), David Hesla argues that the latter are "two enemy pieces which have been taken and put out of the action."⁴⁴ But Francis Doherty reminds us that red and white are the same side in chess,⁴⁵ and thereby implies that Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell have a common opponent--a traditionally black opponent--in death.

It is certainly true that one of the play's chess games takes place between the apparently mortal characters on the one hand and the immortal universe on the other. But while this game is being played, another is also in progress--a game in which Beckett pits his four red- or white-faced characters against the darkened faces of the theatre audience. The second game's purpose is to frustrate our attempts to interpret Endgame definitively; checkmate occurs when we recognise that the play is meant to be a counterpart both to the infinitely complex world around us and to the equally complex human mind--a counterpart that resists even the most ingenious of explications.

Throughout this game, Beckett as White is on the offensive, and thus requires us to develop defences against his attack. The most obvious defence is to assume that Endgame is essentially

naturalistic--that it presents us with ostensibly real people enacting a real-life situation. Initially, the action might seem to take place in a bomb shelter in the aftermath of a nuclear war. Yet there is no explicit evidence that this is the situation the play presents; moreover, comments in the dialogue to the effect that there is "[n]o more nature" (E, p. 16), that there are "no more tide[s]" (E, p. 41), and that the seeds Clov plants will "never sprout" (E, p. 17) suggest that a disaster of a quite different kind has taken place. Ruby Cohn has pointed out that in earlier drafts of Endgame, Beckett makes repeated references to the Flood, and even has Clov read out a passage from Genesis.⁴⁶ But our sense that the play dramatises some latter-day judgement on man is undermined by the prayer scene in the final version, where God is said to be a "bastard" who "doesn't exist" (E, p. 38).

Moreover, if Endgame is meant to be a condemnation of the wickedness of our times, its effect is diffuse. "Why," F.N. Lees has asked, "is it at Sedan that Hamm's parents lost their legs?--Sedan where the 'Second Empire' ended? Is it only a freak that Napoleon III was a prisoner at Ham? . . . [Is] there a clue here to a political face to the paradigm?"⁴⁷ Lees is right to advance these suggestions as rhetorical questions rather than dogmatic statements, because the name "Sedan," for example, raises as many interpretive problems as it solves. Sedan was indeed the place where the Second Empire ended; yet it was also the site of a major battle at the beginning of the Second World War.⁴⁸ If, as audience, we begin to suppose that Endgame is a condemnation of life in nineteenth- or twentieth-century France, we must, in addition, contend with the fact that "Clov" is a possible reference to Clovis, the famous early

medieval king of Gaul. The allusion expands in significance when we remember that the royal name "Clovis" was eventually softened to "Louis":⁴⁹ Endgame now seems more probably a comment on French history generally, than on France of the last hundred years. On the other hand, there is no definitive evidence that the play is either set in France or is exclusively about that country: Sedan is mentioned, but so are Kov (E, p. 36; a possible reference to Kovno, Lithuania), and Lake Como (E, p. 21), which is in Italy.

Beckett is vague not only about the setting of Endgame but about the identity and relationships of its characters. Their names (all first names, apparently) suggest a bewildering array of nationalities in a family in which it is clear that Nagg and Nell are Hamm's parents, but only implied that Clov is Hamm's adoptive son. We learn next to nothing about the characters' past--about their occupations and living conditions prior to entering the shelter--and are never quite certain about the factors that motivate their behaviour. Why Clov continues to serve Hamm, for example, is a question the play never answers definitively. One explanation seems to be that Hamm is the only character who knows the combination to the food cupboard, and that he retains Clov's loyalty by threatening him with starvation. Yet Hamm is blind: Beckett perplexes us with the question of how it is possible for a blind man to operate a combination lock.⁵⁰ Moreover, we are told time and again that things are running out, the implication being that all four characters are living in any case on a starvation diet. Why, then, does Clov stay? Where does he get the energy to climb up and down ladders, and to push Hamm around the stage? Why do he and the other characters not show more signs of increasing physical decrepitude?

All these questions and more would be answered by a conventional naturalist in order to create and maintain an illusion of reality. It is, however, part of Beckett's strategy in his chess game against the audience that they be left unanswered. Beckett not only fails to create an illusion of reality through his vagueness about details; he undermines, in Brechtian fashion, whatever illusion the play might fortuitously create, by insisting on Endgame as theatre. Thus, in answer to Clov's repeated question, "What is there to keep me here?", Hamm at one point says, "The dialogue" (E, p. 39); elsewhere, he speaks of delivering both "an aside" and his "last soliloquy" (E, p. 49). These insistent disruptions of our suspension of disbelief are not just playful bits of comedy; they are deliberately included to make us abandon our attempts to interpret Endgame naturalistically.

An alternative defence to Beckett's attack is the symbolic, or allegorical. Given the episode in which Hamm lays a hand on the wall of the shelter and says, "Old Wall! (Pause.) Beyond is the . . . other hell" (E, p. 23), we might suppose that Endgame is meant to depict a timeless, punitive afterlife. Our sense of this is reinforced by Clov's comment that the time is always the same--"Zero" (E, p. 13)--suggesting that the shelter is a place where time stands still. For Nagg and Nell, significantly, "yesterday" is a meaningless term: it applies not to any previous day in the shelter, but to a life they remember living much earlier. Moreover, Clov's comment that "[s]omething is taking its course" (E, p. 17) suggests that all four characters are being punished like Sisyphus, in having to play the "endgame" endlessly.

In another depiction of hell, Dante's Inferno, many of the sufferers are people who lived with Dante in Florence. Endgame's

characters, on the other hand, seem to derive from earlier works of literature. Hamm has often been said to be based on the Ham of Genesis, Noah's son; yet he also recalls the Ham of David Copperfield, just as old Mother Pegg recalls Peggotty. Nell, too, may be Dickensian: her apparent death in the play calls to mind the famous death of Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop. Dickens and the Bible are not Beckett's only sources, however: Hamm reminds us also of Hamlet, and Hamm and Clov of Proust's Charlus and Jupien, respectively.⁵¹ In addition, the name "Hamm" may, as various critics have said, be a shortened form of "hammer," where the other characters are nails.⁵²

Obviously, all these possibilities lead in different symbolic directions. If Hamm is a hammer and the others are nails, Endgame would seem to be making the same point as Sartre's Huis clos: that hell is other people. But if Hamm is the Ham of Genesis, the play is, arguably, about God's (or in His absence, Beckett's) displeasure at the existence of filial impiety; or if he is Dickens's Ham, displeasure with Victorian sentimentality. Alternatively, if Hamm is based on Charlus and Clov on Jupien, the play could be a condemnation of homosexuality; and if Hamm reminds us of Hamlet, a condemnation of vacillation. Endgame might also be regarded, however, as an expression of Beckett's sympathy for human weakness--as a comment that life is hell for homosexuals, for the naive and sentimental, and for those who procrastinate or feel contempt for their fathers. Frustrated by this surfeit of symbolic possibility, we are obliged to concede that, like the naturalistic, the symbolic defence against Beckett's attack is unsatisfactory.

The next defence that suggests itself, the expressionistic, is based on the assumption that the set of Endgame is a reflection not of the world at large, but of the interior of a skull. The play's allusions again suggest a number of different interpretive possibilities. David Hesla and Ross Chambers, for example, find in Hamm's desire to be at the centre of the skull-like set evidence for a Cartesian interpretation:⁵³ Hamm, says Hesla, is meant to be "unextended thinking substance, [and] Clov the Body-Sensory apparatus which is extended and unthinking."⁵⁴ Similarly, Martin Esslin suggests that Endgame may allude as a whole to Evreinov's Theatre of the Soul, in which, as in Beckett's play, one of the characters represents the rational half of a personality, and the other the emotional.⁵⁵ Colin Duckworth sees in the play's relationship to the story of the Flood the possibility of a Jungian interpretation: Jung, he reminds us, considers Noah's ark to be "a 'kind of giant uterus.' Hamm, having attained in his womb-like rotunda something resembling the timeless peace of the embryonic existence, refuses to be reborn, to go out."⁵⁶ Like G.C. Barnard before him, Duckworth regards Hamm and Clov as two halves of a schizophrenic personality.⁵⁷

Each of these expressionistic interpretations can be faulted on points of detail⁵⁸--the one fault they have in common being that they do not take sufficient account of Nagg and Nell. Much more satisfactory (from this point of view) than any other expressionistic interpretation advanced so far is one no critic has yet attempted: an interpretation based on the observation that Endgame alludes extensively to Freud's essay, "The Ego and the Id" (1923).⁵⁹

In his essay, Freud posits the existence of three mental components--the ego, the id and the super-ego--and attempts a

diagrammatic representation of the mind. The diagram is important, because it bears an uncanny resemblance to the set of Endgame, as seen from above.⁶⁰ It is a rounded figure with a small box on its circumference in exactly the position of Clov's kitchen, marked "Acoust.," with an area next to it, in the same position as the windows, designated "Pcpt.-Cs." By "Pcpt.-Cs." Freud means the part of the mind that deals with the immediate experience of sense-data--with the data afforded by four of our senses, including our sense of sight. This is significant, since the two windows in Endgame have often been interpreted expressionistically as eyes. The mind's experience of auditory data is for Freud a thing apart: he gives special emphasis to our assimilation of the aural on the grounds that it is the means by which we learn language. It is appropriate, then, that "Acoust."--the part of the mind that deals with aural data--appears in the place occupied by Clov's kitchen, since Clov often reminds us that he has learned to use language from listening to Hamm.⁶¹

Clov himself can be identified with the ego, the part of the mind that orders our conscious thoughts. Significantly, Clov "love[s] order" (E, p. 39), and is responsible for the storage and dispensation of supplies. Hamm in turn can be identified with the id, which, in contrast to the ego, is not an ordered and ordering mental constituent, but is instead a welter of passions, instincts and repressed memories. Just as Hamm is blind, and often acts cruelly and thoughtlessly, so the id blindly strives to satisfy its desires; in itself, it is completely without conscience. Freud tells us, however, that

in its relation to the id, [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own. (EI, p. 25)

Significantly, Clov has sometimes inspected Hamm's paupers on horseback, and is often also seen transforming Hamm's will into action to suit his own purposes. A good example occurs in the exchange following Hamm's narration of his chronicle, where he apparently bullies Clov into commenting on it:

HAMM: . . . I've got on with my story . . . (Pause. Irritably.) Ask me where I've got to.
 CLOV: Oh, by the way, your story?
 HAMM: (surprised). What story?
 CLOV: The one you've been telling yourself all your . . . days.
 HAMM: Ah you mean my chronicle?
 CLOV: That's the one.
Pause.
 HAMM: (angrily). Keep going, can't you, keep going! (E, pp. 39-40).

When only a few moments later, the conversation begins to flag, Clov uses the same words as Hamm has in order to revive it: "Keep going, can't you, keep going!" (E, p. 41). It is evident from this that Clov originally allowed himself to be bullied into conversation because he prefers conversation to silence; he is anxious for Hamm to continue, despite his apparent initial unwillingness to speak. What at first sight appears to be bullying on Hamm's part is in fact, then, manipulation on Clov's: it is a matter of the ego's using the techniques of an intelligent rider to control a difficult horse.

When Freud says that the ego uses "borrowed forces" to control the id, he means that it makes use of the prohibitions of the super-ego, or conscience, to redirect the id's energies. The super-ego,

represented in Endgame by Nagg and Nell, is a constituent of the mind which arises out of the male child's early Oedipus complex--his infant erotic desire for his mother and jealous hatred of his father.⁶² While harbouring these feelings towards his parents, the child at the same time identifies with each: with his mother, as the object of his father's affections; and with his father, as his mother's lover. Consolidation of the child's masculine characteristics requires that the Oedipus complex be quashed. The boy must accordingly take some of his father's authority into himself: out of his father's prohibitions--"you must not do this or that"--arises the super-ego, a mental component that takes on the character of his father and contributes to the boy's developing masculinity. Yet the super-ego also takes on, to a lesser extent, the authority of the mother, so that both parents influence the formation of the boy's conscience.

The fact that the super-ego derives from parental authority--and especially paternal authority--is the evidence for suggesting that Nagg and Nell represent the conscience in Freudian terms. The fact that Nagg is the more dominant of the two indicates that Endgame is concerned with the interior of a masculine mind. Moreover, it is arguable that Nagg and Nell appear in dust-bins because they are authority figures Hamm no longer respects. As Freud tells us, the "course of childhood development leads to an ever-increasing detachment from parents, and their personal significance for the super-ego recedes into the background,"⁶³ to be replaced by the influence of teachers, self-chosen heroes, and so on.

It would be possible to elaborate further this Freudian reading of Endgame. Yet no amount of additional detail would disguise the

fact that it embodies a number of shortcomings, some being the shortcomings of expressionist readings in general. The first of these is that the identification of characters with the various components of mind is inexact and ultimately unsatisfactory. To some extent, Hamm resembles the id; yet his composition of a story, his abstract reflections on the meaning of existence, and his teaching of language to Clov are all inconsistent with the wholly unintellectual workings of the id. Similarly, though as ego Clov should theoretically embody, as Freud says, "reason and common sense" (EI, p. 25), he is often given to angry, uncontrolled outbursts of passion; he ends the play, tellingly, with a bitter indictment of friendship, beauty and order. And, while in Freudian terms, Nagg and Nell ought to serve as Hamm's conscience, that role is more often assumed by Clov--as, for example, in the following passage:

CLOV: (harshly.) When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (Pause.) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.
HAMM: (feebly.) I hadn't any. (E, p. 48)

Here there are two inconsistencies with Freudian theory: not only does Clov act as conscience, independently of Nagg and Nell, but Hamm is seen to feel guilty--unlike the id, which is completely amoral, and merely redirects the discharge of its energies when subject to the super-ego's prohibitions.

One important difficulty with expressionistic interpretations of Endgame is that of trying to find a psychological theory to fit the play exactly. A Freudian interpretation, though attractive at first sight, does not hold up under scrutiny; nor do the Jungian or Cartesian interpretations other critics have offered. Another difficulty is that of finding mental equivalents for the various on-

stage props: critics are quick to identify the characters with various elements of the mind, but neglect to assign expressionistic significance to the biscuits, wheel-chair, rat, flea and flea-powder that also appear in the play. It could be argued, of course, that these items are meant to be memories of an earlier life; but there are other problems as well. For example: if Hamm and Clov are meant to be two of the constituents of a mind, what significance are Hamm's confinement to a wheel-chair and Clov's limp meant to have? Or again: if Endgame is not altogether expressionistic, but is instead meant to portray two naturalistic characters, Hamm and Clov, and their shared projection of mind--Nagg and Nell--why is it that Hamm and Clov have this projection in common? Why should it be the case, in other words, that they suffer from exactly the same sort of madness?

Human ingenuity being what it is, answers to each of these questions can probably be found.⁶⁴ Beckett, however, pre-empts our critical efforts in one of Hamm's speeches. "Imagine," says Hamm, "if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. (Voice of rational being.) 'Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at'" (E, p. 27). Here we are being teased: Endgame is clearly too complex to yield either to a straightforward naturalistic, expressionistic or symbolic interpretation on the one hand, or to some combination of such interpretations on the other. Its range of allusions and interpretive possibilities is simply too vast. In no matter what direction we move as audience, we are in check.

According to Robert Wilcher, Beckett's overall purpose in Endgame is to make us "feel the inadequacy of approaching reality by trying to impose systems upon the minute-by-minute flux of sense impressions."⁶⁵ Wilcher is essentially right; but his argument needs to be further developed, because it proceeds from an insufficiently detailed reading of an important passage in Murphy, Beckett's first novel; and because it presents Endgame as a paradigm of the world of sense data, without admitting that it might also be a paradigm of the human mind.

The passage in Murphy to which Wilcher refers us occurs in the opening chapter, where Murphy bids Neary farewell:

Neary came out of one of his dead sleeps and said:

'Murphy, all life is figure and ground.'

'But a wandering to find home,' said Murphy.

'The face,' said Neary, 'or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion.' (Mu, p. 7)

Wilcher does not point out that Neary's comments derive from the work of two famous experimental psychologists, Edgar Rubin and William James. As we saw in Chapter Four, James argues in The Principles of Psychology that we experience sense-data initially as a "great, blooming buzzing confusion";⁶⁶ Rubin holds that we organise the data by assigning a greater prominence to some, which we form into a perceptual whole known as "figure"; and a lesser importance to the rest, which we resolve into a secondary configuration, "ground."⁶⁷

Experiments performed by Rubin's contemporaries reveal that the figure-ground distinction makes for a simplification of what is perceived. "Experienced perceptual wholes," the experimenters found, "tend toward the greatest regularity, simplicity, and clarity possible under the given conditions."⁶⁸ To perceive and interpret Endgame is to simplify it, inevitably. The play invites

interpretation in response to its allusions; but these are so many and varied as to require us to give greater prominence to some than to others--to treat some as figure and others as ground. If Beckett's allusions to Freud or Jung or Descartes strike us especially forcibly, we will interpret Endgame expressionistically, and treat other possibilities as secondary. But if, on the other hand, his allusions to the Bible or nineteenth-century history or fiction seem more important, we will tend to assume that the play is concerned with the world at large. Neither kind of interpretation is, however, definitive: to move decisively in one direction or another is, as we have seen, to move into check.

Wilcher is right to suggest that Endgame is a comment on the "inadequacy of approaching reality by trying to impose systems upon the minute-by-minute flux of sense impressions." Since our every experience of sense-data is a simplification, our overall view of the world, which is based on a series of simplifications of sense-data, is of necessity a mere approximation to the world's infinite complexity. But the term "reality" includes more than Wilcher seems prepared to admit: it includes our experience not only of the world at large, but of the world within--the world of our minds. Unlike the world at large, the mind is not available for perceptual investigation; theories about what it is like must therefore be based partly on the investigator's own experience of introspection, and partly on his observation of the behaviour and inner experience of other people. Obviously, both sources of information are unsatisfactory, because they are not as direct as perception, and because in the process of interpreting the information, the investigator is obliged to assign some of it the prominence of

"figure," while treating other material as "ground." Every theory of the nature of the mind will therefore be as inadequate to describe it as the metaphysical systems that have been advanced to describe the complexities of the world at large. Only an omniscient God can appreciate fully what the world and the mind are like: no human theory about either (or about the final meaning of Endgame) will suffice.

It is because mankind is less than omniscient that Beckett wins his chess game against the audience; and it is because the play's characters are (ostensibly) mortal that they are fated to lose their game against death. If they could be certain of the existence of God, there would be consolation for their awareness of the inevitability of defeat: their hopeless struggle could then be seen to be part of His inscrutable (but to the faithful, ultimately beneficent) plan. But Hamm and Nagg both cast God's existence seriously into doubt--Nagg by questioning the traditional argument from design in his story of the tailor's botched pair of trousers; and Hamm by posing to God's disadvantage the equally traditional problem of evil in his story of the unfeeling feudal lord who turns from his preparations for Christmas to deny help to a suppliant. In the absence of God, and in the context of eternity, man's life is meaningless. As Pozzo remarks in Waiting for Godot, "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (WG, p. 89): the individual life is a mere glimmer in the eternal dark. Yet, as we have seen, Vladimir points out shortly afterwards that the traditional three score and ten is, paradoxically, a very long time: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the

forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener" (WG, pp. 90-91).

This comment finds a parallel in Endgame in Beckett's references to the paradox of the millet seed--the paradox of "that old Greek" (E, p. 45), Eubulides of Miletus.⁶⁹ Just as, in the paradox, a heap of millet seed can never be formed, so, as Hamm says, it would seem impossible for the millions of moments in a lifetime to amount to anything significant. For the individual unable to accept that there is a God-given meaning to life, "life protracted" is indeed "protracted woe." What Vladimir means by saying that "habit is a great deadener" is, as we saw earlier, partly that we each have a Proustian mechanism for coping with the harshness of the experience of sense-data; and partly that establishing a routine--a series of habits--can serve as a palliative to our painful awareness that life is meaningless and death inevitable.

The structural circularity of Endgame suggests that the play as a whole is a routine endlessly repeated by the four characters in order to pass the time. It is part of the routine for Hamm and Nagg to tell their stories over and over again; and it is significant that in his story, Hamm identifies with the narrator/feudal overlord, who has the power of life and death over other people. This is consistent with Hamm's repeated attempts outside the story to elevate himself to the level of tragic hero in his many echoes of Shakespeare, and to the level of Christ in his echo of the Passion.⁷⁰ But Hamm's aspirations to godhead are futile: aware of the brevity and meaninglessness of life, and of the need to palliate what Beckett has called "the suffering of being" (P, p. 19), Hamm assumes throughout his chess game with death a thinly-veiled pretence of

power. He is joined in the game by the other characters, who are also aware of being fated to lose; and who, in pretending to a power they lack, resist Hamm's attempts to dominate them.

Martin Esslin has said that "Endgame . . . has a very deep and direct impact, which can spring only from its touching a chord in the minds of a very large number of human beings."⁷¹ Surely it is the case that Endgame touches two chords: a deeply-felt sense that the characters' impotence in the face of death--the certainty that they will lose their chess game--is something all of us share; and a sense, too, that the game Beckett plays against us is the game we play against the world and our minds all our lives long--and are, again, inevitably fated to lose.

4

Shortly after completing Fin de Partie, Beckett wrote a play entitled "The Gloaming," as well as two mimes, Acte sans paroles I and Acte sans paroles II, which he translated as Act Without Words I and Act Without Words II, respectively.⁷² "The Gloaming" itself has never appeared in print, though Beckett translated a truncated version of it into French for publication as Fragment de Théâtre.⁷³ He later translated Fragment de Théâtre into English as Theatre I for publication in the collection Ends and Odds, together with a short play he wrote originally in French and translated as Theatre II;⁷⁴ these two plays are entitled Rough for Theatre I and Rough for Theatre II in the Faber Collected Shorter Plays.⁷⁵ The four plays are all very minor; Act Without Words I, Rough for Theatre I and

Rough for Theatre II are the most directly concerned with the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.⁷⁶

Act Without Words I focuses on a single male character who at the beginning of the play is flung backwards on stage from the right wing onto a set that is meant to represent a desert bathed in "[d]azzling light" (AI, p. 43). A whistle sounds in the right wing, and the man attempts to go offstage right, but is flung back; the same happens when a whistle sounds in the left wing and he attempts to go off left. A tiny carafe labeled "water" descends from the flies, but the man finds he is unable to reach it even by standing first on one, then on two cubes provided from above. A rope appears, and he tries and fails to climb up to the carafe; he also fails to secure it by using the rope as a lasso. Discouraged, he finally lies down on stage and makes no further effort to reach it.

Act Without Words I recalls not only the myth of Tantalus, but also the experiments performed on chimpanzees by the Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler early this century.⁷⁷ One experiment "involved a banana placed at ceiling level of the cage as well as a box, which if maneuvered properly so it was under the banana, would permit the chimpanzee to jump up from its top to secure the banana. Almost all the chimps solved the problem of moving the box to the correct spot under the banana, climbing up on the box, and jumping to get the banana."⁷⁸ In Act Without Words I Beckett is suggesting that man lacks the ability to solve not simple physical problems like those posed to the chimpanzees, but more complex metaphysical problems concerning the nature of man and the world at large. Like the main character in the play, we may be tempted to imagine that the solutions to metaphysical problems lie within human reach; however,

once we become aware of the difficulties involved in trying to solve the problems definitively, we are obliged to admit defeat. Act Without Words I is a highly appropriate afterpiece, or "codicil,"⁷⁹ to Endgame, for the main character's failed attempts to reach the carafe of water parallel our own equally hopeless efforts, as audience, to reach a definitive view of either Endgame or the world at large.

Though Act Without Words I and Act Without Words II are clearly minor works, Beckett nevertheless thinks well enough of them to allow them to be performed. By contrast, he has steadfastly refused permission to anyone seeking to stage either Rough for Theatre I or Rough for Theatre II: he considers the two plays to be of a lower standard than his other work, and regards Rough for Theatre I in particular as an inferior version of Endgame.⁸⁰

The two main characters in Rough for Theatre I, A and B, are reminiscent of Hamm and Clov. A, like Hamm, is blind and B, like Clov, crippled; it is B, however, who sits in a wheelchair throughout the play, propelling it about the stage by means of a pole, as Hamm does.⁸¹ In Endgame it is implied that Hamm and Clov have been living together for some time, while in Rough for Theatre I A and B meet for the first time at the beginning of the play. Within its first few lines B suggests to A that they "join together, and live together, till death ensue" (RTI, p. 67). He envisions entering into a symbiotic relationship with A: A would push him around in his wheelchair, relieving B of the need to use his pole; B would give A directions as they travel together, ensuring that the blind A would no longer get lost. The fact that B nicknames A "Billy," a variant of "Will," suggests that the relationship B wants to enter into is

something like the relationship between the intellect and the will in Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea. "[T]he happiest figure of the relation [of the will and the intellect]," says Schopenhauer there, "is the strong blind man who carries on his shoulders the lame man who can see" (WWI, II, 421).

Another possibility suggested by Beckett's use of the name "Billy" in preference to "Will," however, is that Rough for Theatre I owes something to Melville's "Billy Budd." In that story Billy is a handsome young sailor who attracts the friendship of almost everyone in the crew. "[T]hey all love him," comments one of the characters. "Some of 'em do his washing, darn old trousers for him; the carpenter is at odd times making a pretty little chest of drawers for him. Anybody will do anything for Billy Budd; and it's the happy family here."⁸² The fact that B uses his son's name, Billy, as a nickname for A indicates that the former would like to enter into a similar "happy family" relationship. But just as Billy Budd's life on shipboard is soured by the envy of the Master at Arms, so B sours his own friendship with A by striking out at him with his pole as A pushes his wheelchair, and then by threatening to take away his only source of income, the fiddle he plays in order to attract alms.

B: . . . What if I took it, Billy, and made off with it?
 [Pause.] Eh Billy, what would you say to that? [Pause.]
 There might be another old man, some day, would come out
 of his hole and find you playing the mouth-organ. And
 you'd tell him of the little fiddle you once had.
 [Pause.] Eh Billy? [Pause.] Or singing. . . . There
 croaking to the winter wind [rime with unkind],
 having lost his little mouth-organ. [He pokes him in the
 back with the pole.] Eh Billy? [A whirls round, seizes
 the end of the pole and wrenches it from B's grasp.]
 (RTI, p. 73)

Here the play ends, echoing a passage from As You Like It:

Amiens: Blow, blow, thou winter wind,

Thou art not so unkind
 As man's ingratitude;
 Thy tooth is not so keen,
 Because thou art not seen
 Although thy breath be rude.
 Heigh-ho! sing heigh-ho! unto the green holly.
 Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly.
 (II.vii.174-81)⁸³

This rather slight play appears, then, to be an indictment of love and friendship reminiscent of Beckett's treatment of these topics in his essay on Proust. Beckett's interest in the limitations of love and friendship surfaces in his trilogy of novels, as we have seen; there, however, the limitations are explored with far greater sophistication than in Rough for Theatre I, and are related to the limitations of human knowledge. Rough for Theatre I disappoints us because Beckett fails to develop it as fully as he might have.

In Rough for Theatre II there are three characters: A and B, who are later identified as Bertrand and Morvan, respectively, and a character known only as C, who stands by a window with his back to them throughout the play. Evidently C has decided to commit suicide, and A and B have been sent by a mysterious third party to examine the reasons behind his decision.⁸⁴ From the start they believe that they should "let him jump," for his "[w]ork, family, . . . [marriage], finances, . . . health, housing conditions," and so on are all "disasters" (RTII, p. 78).

The gravity of his situation is made light of when B reads to the audience comic testimonies prepared by people who know C. Thus "Mr Moore, . . . comedian, c/o Widow Merryweather-Moore, All Saints on the Wash, and lifelong friend," writes: "'To hear him talk about his life, after a glass or two, you would have thought he had never set foot outside hell. He had us in stitches. I worked it up into a

skit that went down well'" (RTII, p. 80). Like Arsene in Watt, Mr Moore is clearly a master of "the laugh that laughs . . . at that which is unhappy" (W, p. 47)--the laugh with which, throughout, we are invited to respond to the play. It is difficult for us to take C's problems altogether seriously, for in addition to his quite genuine psychological problems--his "need of affection, . . . congenital timidity [and] morbid sensitivity to the opinion of others"--C suffers, ludicrously, from "nose trouble" and a "pathological horror of songbirds" (RTII, p. 82).

This last takes on greater significance near the end of the play, when one of the two caged finches on stage suddenly bursts into song, and C (to all appearances) begins to weep. Though the obvious conclusion to draw is that he has been driven to tears by the sound of the bird, Beckett hints at another possibility when we learn that the one finch is singing in spite of the death of its mate. The suggestion here is that C is weeping at the thought that his passing will probably be only briefly mourned: for other people life will go on, and in all probability he will soon be forgotten. That Beckett refuses to be more explicit about the cause of C's tears is entirely consistent with his artistic practice in other novels and plays. To say too much about C's behaviour would be to imply that it is possible to provide a definitive account of another person's motivation--something Beckett considers impossible.

Like Rough for Theatre I, Rough for Theatre II is a play lacking in depth and sophistication: its chief interest lies in the fact that it is indirectly related to the trilogy. C's "black future" (RTII, p. 86) is, as Katharine Worth has noted, "Un avenir d'encre" (FTII, p. 55)--a writer's future--in the original French.⁸⁵ In the

light of this, it may well be that the genesis of Rough for Theatre II was Beckett's preoccupation with the suicide of Nicolas de Stael, a writer who felt he had nothing more to say and who in despair threw himself out of a window. In an interview with Israel Shenker in 1956, Beckett complained that The Unnamable had "'landed me in a situation that I can't extricate myself from.'" There, he said, "'there's complete disintegration. No 'I,' no 'have,' no 'being.' No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on.'" Shenker then asked what he proposed to do--whether he would just go on trying--to which Beckett replied: "'There are others, like Nicolas de Stael, who threw themselves out of a window--after years of struggling.'"⁸⁶ The problems imposed on the writer by the limits of human knowledge--problems leading to an unavoidable art of failure--may be another cause of C's tears.

5

Beckett's next major stage play after Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, harks back to his first short story, "Assumption," in that its main character, Krapp, is, like the story's main character, devoted to a self-styled religion of art. Krapp's religion of art, however, derives not from Joyce but from Proust. On tape at the age of thirty-nine Krapp speaks of "that memorable night in March . . . when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that . . . set it alight" (KLT, p. 60).⁸⁷ The vision he describes has an important counterpart in a passage at the

end of Le Temps retrouvé, where Proust's narrator too sees "the whole thing"--sees, that is, how the novel we know as A la recherche du temps perdu should be written.⁸⁸

That novel is to derive, as Beckett tells us in his 1931 essay on Proust, from the narrator's successive experiences of the "miracle" of involuntary memory.⁸⁹ Proust's narrator ultimately dedicates himself to a religion of art--to the "vocation" of writing; he envisions the task before him as being so demanding as to become "la plus austère école de la vie, et le vrai Jugement dernier."⁹⁰ Similarly, Krapp undertakes the task of translating his vision into a work of literature in a spirit of determined self-sacrifice: the taped memory of his excitement over that "memorable night in March" will, he thinks, sustain him against the trials and privations to come. Foremost amongst his trials is the realisation at sixty-nine that his "opus magnum" (KLT, p. 58) is, unlike A la recherche du temps perdu, a colossal failure. "Seventeen copies sold," confesses Krapp near the end of the play, "of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas" (KLT, p. 62). Why his book has failed to sell is never made clear. It may be that his "vision" was spurious, or that, whether spurious or not, it was translated onto the page by an untalented writer. Another possibility, however, is that Krapp took too seriously Proust's narrator's call for the artist to isolate himself from the world. Significantly, there is evidence in the play that Krapp's self-isolation has limited the extent of his knowledge and, ultimately, the range and appeal of his novel.

Proust's narrator speaks of the artist's need to shun the company of other people: he holds love to be a waste of intellectual

energy, the hopeless pursuit of a constantly changing object of desire by a constantly changing subject; he considers friendship to be a cowardly retreat from the difficult, essentially solitary task of artistic creation.⁹¹ Nevertheless, friendship has a part to play in an artist's life, for, says the narrator, "il n'est breuvage si funeste qui ne puisse à certaines heures devenir précieux et réconfortant en nous apportant le coup de fouet qui nous était nécessaire, la chaleur que nous ne pouvons pas trouver en nous-même" (R, II, 395). Elsewhere he speaks of his need as an artist to venture occasionally into society: " . . . de légères amours avec des jeunes filles en fleurs seraient un aliment choisi que je pourrais à la rigueur permettre à mon imagination semblable au cheval fameux qu'on ne nourrissait que de roses" (R, III, 987).

Krapp takes a more extreme view of artistic self-isolation than Proust. Rather than permit himself even the occasional dalliance with "des jeunes filles en fleurs," he breaks off with a woman he deeply loves shortly after his vision, and thereafter limits his sexual life to masturbation and casual encounters with prostitutes. Why he does this is implicit in his description of the vision:

What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely--(KRAPP switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again)--great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most--(KRAPP curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again)--unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire . . . (KLT, p. 60)

As James Knowlson has shown, "the dark" Krapp had always struggled to keep under prior to his vision is the irrational, unconscious part of his mind, where "the light" represents his

intellect.⁹² What the vision has revealed to him is that the unconscious is a rich source of material for art, and that artistic creation is (as for Proust) a matter of the intellect's translating this material into language. Where Proust believed love to be a waste of the intellectual energy that could be applied to artistic creation, Krapp holds both love and friendship to be a waste of that energy and an unjustifiable dissipation of the dark, the material from which art is made. Krapp rejects love and friendship more firmly than Proust, regarding them as heretical departures from his own private religion of art.

Knowlson points out that Krapp's behaviour has a counterpart in the practice of an early group of Christian heretics, the Manicheans, who dedicated themselves to "the light," the intellect, and sought to suppress "the dark"--passion and sensuality. "Krapp," says Knowlson, "has equated woman with darkness and the irrational;"⁹³ in his "Farewell to Love" he (Krapp) recalls that

I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments--(pause)--after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (KLT, p. 61)

The reason Krapp asks the woman to look at him (and shades her eyes in order that she might) is to gauge her reaction to his proposal that they end their relationship. She has said that she agrees it is "hopeless" going on, but Krapp is not satisfied: only by looking into her eyes--traditionally the windows of the soul--will he know how she really feels. As the stage directions indicate, he is deeply moved to discover that she is willing to open them and "let [him] in"--that is, welcome the continuance of his love.⁹⁴ But although

the sensual part of himself, represented by the shadow, wishes to maintain the relationship, the passion he feels cannot survive the harsh glare of his intellectual decision to devote himself exclusively to art. In this passage, as in the play as a whole, there is a strong sense of regret: Krapp at thirty-nine is obviously sorry to break with the woman, and at sixty-nine regrets having sacrificed so much for the sake of an "opus magnum" that deals not with the complexity of the mind's response to life in society, but rather with the simplicity of self-isolation and self-absorption.

At sixty-nine, only a year short of the traditional three score and ten, Krapp is approaching the ultimate darkness, death. His mother and father are both dead, and the woman in the punt is present only on tape. Intensely lonely, Krapp finds solace partly in memories, partly in drink, and partly in visits from Fanny, that "[b]ony old ghost of a whore" (KLT, p. 62). Though his ability to laugh sardonically at himself has not left him, he recognises clearly that his "best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness" (KLT, p. 63). Krapp would like to think that it has all been worth it, for the sake of his art; however, he gives himself away when he reveals that he now spends much of his time rereading Theodor Fontane's sentimental novel, Effi Briest, weeping as he reflects on Effi's failed love affair and as he reflects, too, on what his own life might have been like.

The hopelessness and pathos of Krapp's situation arise from his having taken too seriously Proust's call for the artist to isolate himself from the rest of the world. The narrator's willingness even to dally with "des jeunes filles en fleurs" is in Krapp's view heresy; once we recognise this, we can see why Beckett incorporated

the Manichean dichotomy of light and dark into the play. Krapp is Beckett's portrait of the artist as an old solitary--a solitary whose failure arises from the folly of his devotion to an unnecessarily ascetic religion of art.

6

In his first plays for the stage, Beckett demonstrates his continuing interest in the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge. In Waiting for Godot, he presents us with a tragicomedy whose departures from the conventions of tragedy and adherence to various established notions of comedy serve to demonstrate what it is like for his characters to inhabit a meaningless world. Endgame is a game played against the audience to show that both the world and the mind are infinitely complex; it is followed by a "codicil" in the form of Act Without Words I. In Rough for Theatre I, Beckett tries to play another game with the audience, but fails to achieve the same complexity as in Endgame; while in Rough for Theatre II he returns to two of his preoccupations in the trilogy: his preoccupation with the folly of love and friendship, which he returns to again in Krapp's Last Tape, and also with the difficulty of "going on" to create new and different works of art. Interestingly, the next development Beckett was to go on to was radio drama; as we shall see in the next chapter, he was to spend the next four years writing plays for the radio medium.

NOTES

¹Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p. 3.

²Quoted in Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 361. On p. 690, n41, Bair comments that Beckett has made much the same remark to various other people.

³Quoted in the Introduction to En attendant Godot: pièce en deux actes, ed. Colin Duckworth (London: Harrap, 1966), p. xlv. (All quotations from En attendant Godot are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by EAG). Similarly, in Just Play: Beckett's Theater (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1980), p. 230, Ruby Cohn says that Beckett once told her: "For me theater is first of all a relaxation from work on fiction. We are dealing with a definite space and with people in this space. That's relaxing."

⁴In The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 45, 60 and 66, Richard Admussen notes that Beckett completed Malone meurt on 30 May 1948 and began work on En attendant Godot on 9 October 1948. He did not start writing L'Innommable until 29 March 1949. Ruby Cohn discusses the impasse he reached between Malone Meurt and L'Innommable in "Growing (Up?) with Godot," in Beckett at 80/ Beckett in Context (New York: Oxford U.P., 1986), p. 13.

⁵Samuel Beckett, quoted by Enoch Brater in Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context, p. 4.

⁶See Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics (Berkeley/Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. 107, for further details. No copy of Le Kid has survived.

⁷Ruby Cohn has published the unfinished Human Wishes (1937) in Just Play: Beckett's Theater, pp. 295-305.

⁸Bair, p. 256.

⁹See James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: the Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), pp. 23-38. Knowlson argues convincingly that it is because the play is so personal that it has "never been published, performed or translated into English" (p. 23).

¹⁰See Frescoes of the Skull, pp. 24-25.

¹¹Samuel Beckett, quoted in Pierre Mélése, Beckett (Paris: Seghers, 1966), p. 148.

¹²Alec Reid, "From Beginning to Date: Some Thoughts on the Plays of Samuel Beckett," in Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Criticism, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 64.

¹³On the other hand, the fact that he has been willing to elucidate certain minor mysteries--the significance of various allusions, for example--is evident from Colin Duckworth's Introduction to the Harrap edition of En attendant Godot, pp. xvii-cxxxi.

¹⁴Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett: a Personal Chronicle," Chelsea Review, No. 2 (Autumn 1958), 7.

¹⁵Quoted in Bair, pp. 382-83.

¹⁶See EAG, p. [iii] and Waiting for Godot (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), p. [iii]. All quotations from Waiting for Godot are from this edition, which Hersh Zeifman identifies as the nearest to being definitive in "The Alterable Whey of Words: the Texts of Waiting for Godot," Educational Theatre Journal, 29 (March 1977), 77-84. Page numbers of quotations are given in the text, preceded by WG.

¹⁷Richard Dutton, Modern Tragicomedy and the British Tradition (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), p. 9. For a full discussion of the various definitions of "tragicomedy" from ancient Rome to the present day, see Marvin T. Herrick, Tragicomedy: its Origin and Development in Italy, France and England (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962). In the final chapter of this monumental study, Herrick concludes that the only definition of the term "tragicomedy" that will accommodate the many variations in its theory and practice in Italy, France and England over the centuries is the following: "a mixed drama utilizing both tragic and comic qualities" (p. 313).

¹⁸See WG, p. 93.

¹⁹Bair, pp. 428-29.

²⁰Here I am in agreement with Ramona Cormier and Janis L. Pallister, who in Waiting for Death: the Philosophical Significance of Beckett's En attendant Godot (University, Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1979), p. 96, comment that "the characters in the play belong neither to comedy nor to tragedy, . . . but to a subtle fusion of the two modes."

²¹Bair, pp. 404-05.

²²Colin Duckworth, Introduction to En attendant Godot, p. lxxxi.

²³Dutton, p. 59, argues that Lucky's allusion to Miranda (in Shakespeare's The Tempest) suggests that Beckett created in Godot a deliberate variation on Renaissance tragicomedy. His argument seems, however, to be based on rather dubious grounds, for he himself notes that "Shakespeare never described any of his plays as a tragicomedy, nor did the editors of the First Folio impose the term upon him,

preferring to squeeze everything into the standard Elizabethan categories of tragedy, comedy and history" (p. 28). The allusion to Miranda is not an obvious link with Renaissance tragicomedy: Dutton might just as well have argued that there is a link with classical tragicomedy when Estragon gives his name as "Catulle" in the first act (EAG, p. 31), or a link with medieval tragicomedy in the fact that the name Pozzo may derive from the Divine Comedy (see note 27).

²⁴Aristotle's Poetics: a Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature, trans. Leon Golden; commentary by O.B. Hardison, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 11. Hardison's is a particularly useful commentary in that it reveals how Aristotelian theory has been modified over the centuries in the theory and practice of drama. All quotations from the Poetics are from this edition.

²⁵In his commentary on the Poetics, p. 93, Hardison notes that for Aristotle, "imitation" is not a matter of creating an illusion of reality, but of revealing in drama "the presence of the universal in the particular. . ." The special task of the dramatist is "to discover actions--simple, unified processes--in a world of undifferentiated singulars. For the tragic poet, this world is usually history, which includes myth and legend as well as 'records of fact.' In Chapter IX of the Poetics, history is defined as a collection of 'singulars'--a record of facts, we might say, like a medieval chronicle. . . . [Yet] Aristotle also says that most tragedies involve a good deal of fiction (that is, invention by the poet) and that it is perfectly legitimate for the poet to follow Agathon and make up his plots entirely" (p. 290). Clearly the plot of Godot is fiction rather than history; as we shall see, the play reveals "the universal in the particular" in its concern with the question of whether God exists and is benevolently disposed to man.

²⁶"I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune. . . . Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep" (WG, p. 86).

²⁷For example, in The Transformations of Godot (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1980), p. 43, Frederick Busi associates the shortened form of Vladimir, "Didi," with Docetism, an early heresy, and says that the shortened form of Estragon, "Gogo," is "colloquial French for a naive being . . .; thus Gogo's name and function resemble those of Sancho, who fulfills the equivalent Spanish theatrical role . . ." (p. 18). Busi also notes that Beckett may have culled the name Pozzo from the Divine Comedy "where pozzo is often used in the sense of a deep pit in hell" (p. 80); another possible source, he says, is "Duke Joseph Pozzo di Borgo [1890-1966], . . . [who] was prominent in profascist movements in Paris during the 1930s when Beckett had already been residing in that city for some time" (p. 79). In The Shape of Paradox: an Essay on Waiting for Godot (Berkeley/Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1978), p. 17, n15, Bert O. States associates the names Didi and Gogo with "Dysmas and Gestas, the names given to the two thieves [crucified with Christ] in the Middle Ages . . ." And in "History Electrified into Anagogy: a Reading of Waiting for Godot," Contemporary Literature, 17 (Spring 1976), 266, Daniel Stempel links the name

Estragon with the Spanish city of Tarragona, scene of "a famous debate between Christians and Jews . . . in 1413-14." The name Vladimir, he says, "is found at both ends of the time-scale of Russian Christianity: the first Russian ruler to be converted to Christianity was Duke Vladimir of Kiev; Vladimir Soloviev, the friend and disciple of Dostoyevski, is one of the greatest religious thinkers of modern Russia" (268). Many other suggestions about the origin of the characters' names--and especially the name "Godot"--have been made by these and other critics; they are too numerous to list here.

²⁸Poetics, p. 22.

²⁹Arthur Miller, "Introduction," Collected Plays (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), p. 32.

³⁰Beckett's interest in Ecclesiastes is even plainer in Murphy, whose opening sentence, "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (Mu, p. 5), clearly echoes Ecclesiastes 1.9: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; . . . there is no new thing under the sun."

³¹Ecclesiastes 1.2-4.

³²See Ecclesiastes 9.7-9.

³³Duckworth, p. cxiii, notes that "The suffix -ot is a common diminutive in French [cf. bellot, 'prettyish', brunot, 'brownish']. . . . 'Godot' has the sense of 'a little god', 'a minor god'. . . ."

³⁴Duckworth, p. cvii.

³⁵Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year," International Theatre Annual, No. 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), 153.

³⁶Poetics, Chapter V, p. 9.

³⁷In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 67, Beryl Fletcher et al. note that the hat-changing routine in Act II (WG, p. 71) "is one used by the Marx Brothers in the film Duck Soup and also by Laurel and Hardy." The two characters' resemblance to clowns and music hall comedians has been noted by almost every critic who has written on Godot.

³⁸See Hardison's commentary on the Poetics, pp. 116-18.

³⁹See Bair, p. 405.

⁴⁰Antonin Artaud, "The Theater and Cruelty," 1933; rpt. in The Theater and its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 36, 85.

⁴¹Watt, p. 47.

⁴²Bair, p. 467.

⁴³All quotations from Endgame are from the Faber and Faber edition (London, 1968). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation E.

⁴⁴David Hesla, The Shape of Chaos: an Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 151.

⁴⁵Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 93.

⁴⁶See Ruby Cohn, "The Beginning of Endgame," Modern Drama, 9 (Dec. 1966), 319-23.

⁴⁷F.N. Lees, "Samuel Beckett," Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, 104, (1961-62), 8-9.

⁴⁸See Basil Collier, A Short History of the Second World War (London: Collins, 1967), pp. 137-9.

⁴⁹See C.W. Hollister, Medieval Europe: a Short History (New York: John Wiley, 1974), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁰Again, how is it possible for a blind man to know, as Hamm does, that his eyes have gone "all white"? (E, p. 13).

⁵¹Michael Robinson provides a convenient summary of Endgame's echoes of Shakespeare in The Long Sonata of the Dead: a Study of Samuel Beckett (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), pp. 266-70. The play's echoes of King Lear and the fact that the ageing Hamm has a young male attendant in Clov put one in mind of Charlus and Jupien. See the narrator's description of Charlus in A la recherche du temps perdu (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), III, 859, where the baron is said to have suffered temporary blindness; and where, though almost childlike in his dependence on Jupien, he is described as having "la majesté shakespearienne d'un roi Lear."

⁵²The suggestion that "Nell" is a variant on the English "nail," Nagg on the German "Nagel," and "Clov" on the French "clou" has been made so often as to have become a critical commonplace.

⁵³See Ross Chambers, "An Approach to Endgame," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 72-73.

⁵⁴The Shape of Chaos, p. 154.

⁵⁵Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), pp. 64-65.

⁵⁶Colin Duckworth, Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Impact in Beckett and Ionesco (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 89.

⁵⁷See G.C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: a New Approach (London: Dent, 1970), pp. 101-9.

⁵⁸Hesla's assertion that Clov, as body, is, in Cartesian terms, extended and unthinking, is inconsistent with the fact that he both speaks and reasons in the play. Esslin admits that Beckett may never have read Evreinov's play, and points out in any case that equating Hamm with the emotional, and Clov with the rational half of a personality raises as many problems as it solves. Duckworth overlooks Hamm's suggestion that Clov build a raft so they can drift with the currents, "far away, to other . . . mammals" (E, p. 28). Though the suggestion is never acted upon, Hamm seems less averse to going out than Duckworth says he is. Nor is there any conclusive evidence to support the view that Endgame presents us with the interior of a schizophrenic mind. Clov's reports of what exists outside may be those of the "madman" Hamm describes, who thought "the end of the world had come" (E, p. 32); but it may just as easily be that Clov's reports are an accurate description of the outer world.

⁵⁹All quotations from this essay are taken from The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), XIX, 12-66. Page numbers will be given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation EI. G.C. Barnard's approach to Endgame in Samuel Beckett: a New Approach, though Freudian, is not based on this essay. In Samuel Beckett, p. 96, Francis Doherty says that we can, "if we so wish, see the Freudian principles of Ego, Id, Super Ego at work" in Endgame; however, he does not develop this comment further.

⁶⁰See EI, p. 24.

⁶¹See, for example, E, p. 32, where Clov says to Hamm: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others."

⁶²See EI, pp. 28-39.

⁶³"The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924), in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), XIX, 168.

⁶⁴Kenneth Tynan, for example, has suggested that Hamm's inability to stand and Clov's to sit indicate that, in Schopenhauerian terms, Hamm represents the will to live and Clov the intellect. (See Tynan's review of Fin de partie in The Observer, 7 April 1957, p. 15; rpt. in Samuel Beckett: the Critical Heritage, ed. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 164-66. Tynan's argument is based on a passage in which Schopenhauer says that the will is, metaphorically, "the strong blind man who carries on his shoulders the lame man who can see" (WWI, II, 421)).

⁶⁵Robert Wilcher, "'What's it meant to mean?': an Approach to Beckett's Theatre," Critical Quarterly, 18 (1976), 21.

⁶⁶William James, The Principles of Psychology (London: Macmillan, 1902), I, 488.

⁶⁷For a discussion of Rubin's work, see Robert I. Watson, The Great Philosophers from Aristotle to Freud (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1968), p. 439.

⁶⁸Solomon E. Asch, "Gestalt Theory," in The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, ed. David Sills (London: Macmillan & The Free Press, 1968), VI, 168.

⁶⁹In her biography, p. 465, Bair points out that it is Eubulides to whom Hamm refers, and not Zeno, who for years has been incorrectly identified by critics as "that old Greek." Eubulides' paradox is given in Diogenes Laertius' Lives of Eminent Philosophers, trans. R.D. Hicks (London: Heinemann, 1950), II, 191, as follows: "It cannot be that if two is a few three is not so likewise, nor that if two or three are few, four is not so; and so on up to ten. But if two is few, therefore so also is ten." Obviously, the paradox may be extended beyond ten to infinity: a heap of millet seed can never be formed because whatever the number of seeds, there will always be only a few.

⁷⁰For Hamm's echo of the Passion, see E, p. 52, where he calls out: "Father! (Pause. Louder.) Father!"

⁷¹The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 68.

⁷²In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), pp. 108 and 110, Beryl Fletcher et al. note that Acte sans paroles I was written in 1956 and first published in the same volume as Fin de Partie (Paris: Minuit, 1957). Beckett's English translation, Act Without Words I, was first published by Grove Press (New York) in 1958. Acte sans paroles II was written in French at about the same time, and was first published in English in New Departures, 1 (Summer 1959), 89-90.

⁷³See Samuel Beckett, Fragment de Théâtre, Minuit, 8 (mars 1974), 65-72). A fuller discussion of the relationship between "The Gloaming" (dated December 1956) and Beckett's subsequent versions of it in English and French is to be found in James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: the Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), pp. 229-31.

⁷⁴In Frescoes of the Skull, p. 231, Knowlson notes that Theatre II was first written in French in 1958, after Beckett had completed work on Krapp's Last Tape, and that it was first published in English in Ends and Odds (New York: Grove Press, 1976).

⁷⁵In "Past into Future: Krapp's Last Tape to Breath," in Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 33, n2, Katharine Worth suggests that Beckett may have changed the titles to bring them into line with the titles of his two short radio plays, Rough for Radio I and Rough for Radio II. All quotations from Rough

for Theatre I and Rough for Theatre II are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). All quotations from the French versions of the plays, Fragment de Théâtre I and Fragment de Théâtre II, are from Samuel Beckett, Pas suivi de quatre esquisses (Paris: Minuit, 1978). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by RTI, RTII, FTI and FTII, in the case of Rough for Theatre I, Rough for Theatre II, Fragment de Théâtre I and Fragment de Théâtre II, respectively.

⁷⁶All quotations from Act Without Words I and Act Without Words II are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by AI and AII, respectively. Act Without Words II features two characters, A and B, who are initially in sacks. A goad enters right, darts forward into A's sack, then retreats. A crawls out of his sack, "halts, broods, prays, broods, gets to his feet, broods, takes a little bottle of pills from his shirt pocket . . . puts on clothes, broods, takes a large partly-eaten carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece . . . takes off clothes (except shirt), lets them fall in an untidy heap, broods, takes another pill, broods, kneels, prays, crawls into sack and lies still . . ." (AII, pp. 49-50). The goad then enters on a wheeled support and darts at B. B emerges from his sack and behaves much as A has done, except that he leaves his clothes in a tidy heap, spends much of his time consulting his watch, map and compass, and neither broods, prays nor takes pills. In short, A and B appear to be opposite psychological types: when goaded into action, A behaves as an "absent" introvert and B as a "brisk, rapid, precise" extrovert (AII, p. 49). (Beryl Fletcher et al. make a similar point about A and B in A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 111). The overall point of the mime is that, regardless of personality type, the individual is powerless to control or alter the human condition in any substantial way. Like Act Without Words I, Act Without Words II is an interesting formal exercise that looks back to Molloy in its presentation of contrasting psychological types, and forward both to Happy Days (where the activities of the main character, Winnie, are governed by the ringing of a bell) and to Film, where Beckett uses the techniques of mime once again.

⁷⁷In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 109, Beryl Fletcher et al. comment that the "business with the cubes parallels experiments with monkeys in which bananas are placed beyond the animals' reach and various tools are provided to allow them to reach them." Fletcher and her co-authors do not, however, mention that these experiments were first performed by Köhler (for further information see Robert I. Watson, The Great Psychologists from Aristotle to Freud (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1968), p. 446); nor do they relate Act Without Words I to Murphy, whose main character alludes to the fact that the experiments were carried out in Teneriffe (see Mu, p. 7).

⁷⁸Watson, p. 446.

⁷⁹Beckett described Act Without Words I as a "codicil" to Endgame in a letter to his American publisher, Barney Rosset, on 27

August 1957. (Reprinted in Clas Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting (Ab8: Ab8 Akademi, 1976), p. [3]).

⁸⁰I owe this information to Professor Robert Scanlan, Director of Drama at MIT, who in conversation on 13 February 1987 said that Beckett had told him that these were the grounds on which he refused to let the two plays be performed.

⁸¹In Frescoes of the Skull, p. 230, James Knowlson notes that "the early draft of [Rough for] Theatre I, The Gloaming, included further reminiscences of Endgame that were to be removed in the French version . . ."

⁸²Herman Melville, "Billy Budd," in Four Short Novels (N.Y.: Bantam, 1959), p. 202. Melville completed work on the story (a more accurate term, perhaps, than "short novel") in 1891; it was first published posthumously in 1924.

⁸³Beryl Fletcher et al. identify this passage in A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 112.

⁸⁴See RTII, p. 77, where A says "I still don't understand. [Pause.] Why he needs our services. [Pause.] A man like him." At first it might seem that the "he" referred to here is C; later in the play, however, A refers to another case he and B considered some time earlier--that of Smith, a potential suicide who ultimately decided not to kill himself. Evidently the mysterious "he" has referred A and B to a series of cases.

⁸⁵See Katharine Worth, "Past into Future: Krapp's Last Tape to Breath," p. 27.

⁸⁶"Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, 6 May 1956, Section 2, pp. 1 & 3. Cf. the narrator's comment in The Unnamable that "there are even those whose sang-froid is such that they throw themselves out of the window" (U, p. 367).

⁸⁷All quotations from Krapp's Last Tape are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by KLT.

⁸⁸Beckett's debt to Proust in Krapp's Last Tape has been commented on by various critics, though most fully by Arthur K. Oberg in "Krapp's Last Tape and the Proustian Vision," Modern Drama, 9 (Dec. 1966), 333-38 (rpt. in Theatre Workbook 1: Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, ed. James Knowlson (London: Brutus Books, 1980), pp. 151-57); and by Rosette Lamont in "Krapp, un Anti-Proust," in Beckett, ed. Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (Paris: L'Herne, 1976), 295-305 (trans. Helen Wehringer as "Krapp, an anti-Proust," and published in Theatre Workbook 1: Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, pp. 158-73). Oberg and Lamont reach conclusions quite different from mine.

⁸⁹"Proust," in Proust/Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit (London: John Calder, 1965), p. 34.

⁹⁰A la recherche du temps perdu (Paris, Gallimard, 1954), III, 880. All quotations are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by R.

⁹¹See R, II, 93 and R, III, 100 for comments to this effect about love; and R, II, 394 for comments about friendship. Beckett either alludes to or quotes from these passages in P, pp. 63, 58 and 64-65, respectively. As I have shown in "Beckett, Proust and Schopenhauer," Contemporary Literature, 19 (Spring 1978), 178-79, Beckett distorts Proust's view of friendship on pp. 64-65 of "Proust."

⁹²James Knowlson, "Krapp's Last Tape: the Evolution of a Play, 1958-75," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 1 (Winter 1976), 60-61.

⁹³Knowlson, 62.

⁹⁴This is even clearer in Beckett's French translation of the play, where "Let me in" appears as "M'ont laissé entrer" (see La dernière bande, suivi de Cendres (Paris: Minuit, 1959), p. 25).

CHAPTER NINE

PLAYS FOR RADIO

1

In 1956, shortly after negotiations for broadcast rights to Waiting for Godot had been concluded, the Controller of the BBC Third Programme, John Morris, visited Beckett in Paris to ask whether he would be interested in writing a play specifically for radio.¹ Beckett was enthusiastic about the idea, but emphasised that his output was at best "unpredictable,"² and that it would therefore not be possible for him to say when the play would be finished. "Never thought about a radio play technique," he said in a letter to Nancy Cunard shortly afterwards, "but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something."³ The result was his first radio play, All That Fall; Beckett completed work on it on 27 September 1956, and it was broadcast on 13 January of the following year. Five more radio plays were to follow, each concerned with the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.⁴

2

One of the most formidable problems a radio dramatist must face is that of ensuring that a sense of form emerges from the words and sound effects that comprise his play. Beckett solves this problem in

All That Fall by ensuring that each of its three informal parts is related in some way to the play's title, and, ultimately, to his interest in how much we can hope to know about the existence and benevolence of God. Thus the first part of the play, which dwells on Maddy Rooney's journey to the railway station to meet her blind husband Dan, brings the prospect of falling repeatedly to our attention. As she walks to the station, Maddy is overtaken, first, by a farmer named Christy, who walks beside his dung cart rather than riding on top of it, because he is afraid he might fall; then by a Mr. Tyler, who is riding a bicycle, and who asks if he might steady himself by putting his hand on her shoulder; and finally by a Mr. Slocum, who helps her into his car very carefully, for fear she might fall. In the second part of the play, which concerns her time at the station, the danger of falling is again emphasised: she describes the steps she must climb as being "worse than the Matterhorn" (ATF, p. 24)⁵ when she arrives; Dan refers to them as a "precipice" (ATF, p. 29) as they depart. In the third part, the journey home, Dan reveals that the text of the sermon they are to attend the next day is Psalm 145.14: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down" (ATF, p. 38).

This quotation is an important clue to the fact that in All That Fall Beckett is concerned to raise questions about God's existence and behaviour to man. Dan is one of a number of characters in the play who is "bowed down" (ATF, p. 36) by ill health. "The day you met me," he reminds Maddy, "I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. . . . The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance. . . . No, I cannot be said to be well" (ATF, pp. 31-32). Not only Dan, but indeed, almost all the

characters are in need of God's mercy. Christy's wife and daughter are unwell; Mr. Slocum's mother is ill; the station-master's assistant, Tommy, has lost his parents; a character only mentioned in passing, Mr. Tully, is "in constant pain" (ATF, p. 33); and Dan and Maddy are themselves nearing death. If we ask ourselves why there is so much misery in the play, Beckett offers two alternative answers: human suffering exists either as a matter of chance, or as a matter of design.

All That Fall was originally to have been called Lovely Day for the Races;⁶ racing is governed by chance if the individual races are honest, and by design if they are not. "Divine day for the meeting" (ATF, p. 14), says Mr. Tyler near the start of the play, not realising that the morning's sunshine is to give way to a tempest of wind and rain. The change of weather may be fortuitous; however, through his use of the term "divine," Beckett raises the alternative possibility that the change is part of God's inscrutable plan.

Dan and Maddy believe in God, but unlike Hardy, the preacher--the same Hardy, perhaps, as the one Mr. Tyler saved from falling to his death⁷--they do not believe that "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." From their own experience, and from the suffering of those around them, they have developed a cynical view of God's behaviour to man. Whether they hold that God is merely indifferent to His creatures, or is actively cruel to them, is never made clear; both possibilities are implicit, however, in Beckett's treatment of the child's fall from the train at the end.

Dan may have pushed the child from the carriage, or frightened him/her (whether it is a boy or a girl is never made clear) into

jumping. On their way home, before news of what delayed the train comes to light, he asks Maddy, "Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy [who usually walks him home from the station]. [Pause.] Poor Jerry! [Pause.] What restrained me then? [Pause.] Not fear of man" (ATF, p. 31). While this statement has suggested to some critics that Dan is definitely guilty of murder,⁸ it is equally possible that fear not of man, but of God, restrained him, as in the case of Jerry, from harming the child. And although critics have often taken the object Dan drops at the end to be a child's ball, and hence to be "solidly incriminating evidence,"⁹ Maddy's comment that "It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball" (ATF, p. 38) makes it clear that it is something else altogether. David Alpaugh and Clas Zilliacus have suggested that it may be a testicle;¹⁰ another possibility, however, is that it is nothing more sinister than a wizened piece of potato like the one Leopold Bloom carries with him for luck in Ulysses. In any case, the object is not necessarily connected with the mishap involving the child. Despite Dan's guilty behaviour, there is not enough evidence to prove conclusively that he did the child any harm.

Rather than establishing conclusions at the end of All That Fall, Beckett offers us a selection of possibilities. That the child fell from the train in which Dan was riding may be purely a matter of chance; the child may even have been travelling in a different compartment. Another possibility is that the child was in the same compartment and fell out of an improperly-shut door, with the blind Dan powerless to intercede, and perhaps even unaware that the child

was travelling with him. On the other hand, the child's fall may have been a matter of design on Dan's part: directly or indirectly, he may be guilty of a deliberate act of malice.¹¹

Our uncertainty about what happened finds a parallel in our lack of certainty, more generally, about the existence and benevolence of God. In the absence of conclusive proof that God exists, it may be that there is no God, and that human suffering occurs by chance. Alternatively, there may be a God who knows of our suffering, but who is unwilling (or like the blind Dan) unable to prevent it. Again, it is possible that God exists and is actively cruel: the fact that the preacher of the sermon is a man named Hardy calls to mind (as Belacqua's death in More Pricks Than Kicks does) the famous ending of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, where Thomas Hardy says of Tess, once she has been executed, "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with [her]."¹² Beckett does not urge any one explanation on us as the correct one. As in his other works, he is concerned in All That Fall with the limits of human knowledge, and thus it is entirely appropriate that both the incident at the end and the part God plays in it (if any) should remain shrouded in mystery.

3

In writing All That Fall, Beckett became impressed with radio's ability to create a sense of mystery and to convey to its audience the workings of an individual's mind. Two years were to elapse, however, before he completed his second radio play. During this time, he was preoccupied with the first stage production of Fin de

Partie, with BBC broadcasts of excerpts from some of his novels, and with Krapp's Last Tape, a play inspired by the BBC's use of tape recorders.¹³ His second play for radio reached the BBC's offices in mid-February, 1959; Beckett was not altogether happy with the original title he had given it--Ebb--and changed it to Embers in April. It was first broadcast on 24 June.¹⁴

Embers' main character, Henry, is a man obsessed by the sound of the sea. Throughout the play, he sits on a shingle beach, and as an early stage direction tells us, the sea is "audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated" (Em, p. 93).¹⁵ Shortly after this stage direction, Henry emphasises that the "sound you hear is the sea. [Pause. Louder.] I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. [Pause.] I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was" (Em, p. 93).

Beckett labours the point about the sound of the sea not only because he is aware that a radio audience might mistake it for something else, but because he wants to stress the importance of the role the sea plays in Embers. For the play is in large part a dramatisation of Pozzo's comment that "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (WG, p. 89). Man is mortal, the sea immortal: the individual life gleams an instant, fades into embers, and is finally extinguished. Yet Embers also dramatises Vladimir's observation that for the individual concerned, the traditional three score and ten is a substantial period of time, and a time of suffering at that.¹⁶ This is certainly the experience of its main character, Henry, who has suffered psychologically for many years, and whose sufferings form the basis

of Beckett's investigation of the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

Embers' original title, Ebb, suggests that in addition to being a symbol of immortality, the sea is partly a metaphor for the loss of faith in God and yearning for certainty and security found in much nineteenth century literature. In "Dover Beach," for example, Matthew Arnold says that:

Sophocles long ago
 Heard [the grating roar of pebbles] on the Aegaeon, and it
 brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.¹⁷

Faith in God has clearly ebbed from Henry's life: though as a young man he sought to convince his daughter that when she heard him talking in the lavatory, he was in fact praying--"Roaring prayers at God and his saints" (Em, p. 100)--in old age, he has left whatever faith he may have had in God behind him. Like Arnold, he looks to love as a substitute for faith--though the love that sustains him is self-centred and exploitative.

At various points in the play, Henry calls to his father and to his wife, Ada. What he is doing is summoning them in his imagination, for his father, who does not reply, drowned many years before, and his wife, whose voice does come to mind, makes "[n]o sound as she sits" (Em, p. 97) on the shingle beach beside him. Henry is drawn to the beach not only because of its association with his father's death, but because it was there, twenty years earlier, that he and Ada "did it at last for the first time" (Em, p. 101):

[Sea suddenly rough.]

ADA: [Twenty years earlier, imploring]. Don't! Don't!
 HENRY: [Ditto, urgent.] Darling!
 ADA: [Ditto, more feebly.] Don't!
 HENRY: [Ditto, exultantly.] Darling!

[Rough sea. ADA cries out. Cry and sea amplified, cut off. End of evocation. Pause. Sea calm.]
 (Em, p. 100)

Here the sea's sudden roughness corresponds expressionistically to Henry's callous insistence that Ada yield to his will. His choice of language elsewhere suggests that his approach to sex in marriage was consistently brutal: "It took us a long time to have [our daughter Addie]," he says. "Years we kept hammering away at it. [Pause.] But we did it in the end. [Pause. Sigh.]" (Em, p. 101). "[W]ish to God we'd never had her" (Em, p. 96) he grumbles elsewhere. For Henry, love has been a source of dissatisfaction rather than an adequate replacement for faith.

Guilt about not loving his father, and about not going swimming with him the day he drowned, pervades Henry's attitude to the sea, and makes its sound at once compelling and unwelcome. He talks incessantly in order to drive the sound away, but finds that the noise of the waves is with him whether he is near the sea or not: "I

once went to Switzerland," he says, "to get away from the cursed thing and never stopped all the time I was there" (Em, p. 94).¹⁸ As he talks, he sometimes tells himself stories, though he never finishes them. One story in particular, concerning two old men called Bolton and Holloway, is set in a room with a dying fire, a fire that is "all coal, burning down now" (Em, p. 95), so that there is nothing left but the "dying glow" (Em, p. 95) of the embers.

Henry's insistence on this detail, when taken with the fact that the story is a product of his imagination, and that the title of the play in which he appears is Embers, suggests that Beckett may have had a famous passage from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" in mind when he wrote the play:

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.¹⁹

The "inconstant wind" that awakens the urge to create in Henry's mind is becoming even more inconstant as he grows older. Not only is he unable to finish the Bolton/Holloway story; he is powerless to summon from his imagination either the sound of his father's voice or (toward the end of the play) another sound that gives him comfort, the drumming of horses' hooves. Henry's is a creative mind, but a mind whose powers are failing.

Henry summons his father and Ada to mind because he wants to talk to them about his problems, and to confess (as to a surrogate priest) the guilt he feels over his father's death. His father is,

however, an unsatisfactory confessor figure, because he no longer answers when Henry asks him questions. "I suppose you have worn him out," comments Ada. "You wore him out living and now you are wearing him out dead. . . . The time will come when no one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers. [Pause.] You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours" (Em, p. 102). When Ada leaves him near the end of the play, Henry finds that he is unable to summon either her or his father to mind again.

Accordingly, he returns to his story of Bolton and Holloway, a story that, although filled with vivid visual images of the kind we associate with a radio dramatist's efforts to make us "see," is in places vague about narrative detail. Thus, although we are presented with a picture of "Bolton at the window, grand old figure in his old red dressing-gown" (Em, p. 95), and of Holloway arriving with "his little black bag, not a sound . . . full moon small and white . . . Vega in the Lyre very green" (Em, p. 95), we are not told why Bolton has summoned his friend the doctor in the middle of the night. Henry says only that Bolton is "an old man in great trouble" (Em, p. 94), leaving us to decide for ourselves from the dialogue what this "great trouble" might be:

Holloway: . . . 'We've had this before, Bolton, don't ask me to go through it again.' [Pause.] Bolton: 'Please!' [Pause.] Please! [Pause.] 'Please, Holloway!' [Pause.] Candle shaking and guttering all over the place . . . and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in your old fist, saying, Please! Please! [Pause.] Begging [Pause.] Of the poor. (Em, p. 104)

Clas Zilliacus has suggested that Bolton's object is euthanasia--that he wants Holloway to give him an injection that will end his life.²⁰ This is not, however, borne out by the text, for in addition to

saying "'We've had this before, Bolton, don't ask me to go through it again,'" Holloway offers to inject him: "'If it's an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I'll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine . . .'" (Em, p. 103). The implication is that Bolton has asked in the past for an injection of a pain-killing or sleep-inducing drug, and may be asking for such an injection again, rather than for one that will cause death.

Bolton's problem may be physical--he may be addicted to morphine, for example--but it seems more probable, given that he is "in great trouble," that the problem is psychological. Henry's reference to the candle "shaking in your old fist" (Em, p. 104; italics mine) has suggested to some critics that Bolton is a persona for his father,²¹ and that the purpose of the story is to explore, however tentatively, the reasons behind his father's disappearance. Others have preferred to argue that Bolton is a persona for Henry,²² who is also in trouble psychologically, in that he is haunted by the sound of the sea. In support of their claim, these critics point to Ada's comment, when Henry complains of the sea noise, that "There's something wrong with your brain, you ought to see Holloway, he's alive still, isn't he?" (Em, p. 100).

Whether Bolton should be identified with Henry or his father is, however, ultimately unimportant. What is clear from the story is that Bolton is seeking psychological help from his friend (it is even hinted that he has some guilty secret to confess), but that his imperfectly-articulated supplications are in vain. As Henry says, Bolton is "Begging . . . [o]f the poor" (Em, p. 104): Holloway has nothing to offer apart from a "hollow way" out of the problem, the solace of an injection.

Henry's problems are easier to define. He wants to rid himself of the sound of the sea, which is associated both with guilt over his father's disappearance and with his sense that life is, as in Arnold's "Dover Beach," complex and threatening in the absence of faith. The sound of the sea is the sound of life's randomness, since there is no God to confer meaning and order on his experience. As Louise O. Cleveland has observed, Henry tries to counter this randomness by calling up "a series of raw noises, sharp and in refreshing contrast to the sea: the sound of his feet on the shingle beach, the door slamming on life, the music master's ruler on the piano case. . . . Henry longs for a . . . pattern that can destroy this sea . . . He wishes to make existence into stone or hooves."²³ Existence, however, is too complex to yield to his efforts: though momentarily comforting, Henry's evocation of sharp sounds does nothing either to alter the inchoate character of life or to obviate the inevitability of death. "Thuds, I want thuds!" says Henry at one point. "Like this! [He fumbles in the shingle, catches up two big stones and starts dashing them together.] Stone! [Clash.] Stone! . . . That's life! . . . Not this . . . [Pause.] . . . sucking!" (Em, pp. 100-01). If it is unclear here what he means by "this . . . sucking," we get a better idea earlier in the play, where he directs Ada to listen to the sea: "Listen to it! (Pause.) Lips and claws!" (Em, p. 98). What Henry fears is the process of having life sucked out of him, of being devoured by the sea, which he describes as an "old grave" (Em, p. 98). It is an "old" grave partly in the sense that it seems to have served years before as a grave for his father, but more importantly, too, in the sense that it represents the immortal world of inanimate nature, which has swallowed up

generations of the living. The sharp sounds he makes with the stones may help him to forget that his own death is imminent and inevitable; however, as a means of banishing death, or of rendering life less complex than it in fact is, the sounds represent a "hollow way" once again.

Henry ends the play rather puzzlingly; he consults his diary and discovers that there is

Nothing this evening. [Pause.] Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . . plumber at nine, then nothing. [Pause. Puzzled.] Plumber at nine? [Pause.] Ah yes, the waste. [Pause.] Words. (Em, p. 104)

Coming directly after the passage in which he describes Bolton standing with a candle in his hand, a candle that is "shaking and guttering all over the place" (Em, p. 104), the ending puts us in mind of a famous passage in Macbeth:

To-morrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.²⁴

Words are a "waste" for Henry just as they are for the "idiot" in the passage quoted above: try as he will, man cannot plumb the depths of life's randomness and complexity, and must resign himself to the inevitability of death. Like Bolton's candle and the embers in the story in which he appears, Henry will eventually suffer extinction--as will we all. Such are the limits of knowledge that we cannot say with absolute certainty that life is any more meaningful than this.

Beckett's four remaining radio plays--Words and Music, Rough for Radio I, Rough for Radio II and Cascando--are all concerned with the unfathomability of the human mind. It is important to be aware of the dates they were written, for although it is true to say, as Martin Esslin does, that the four plays are "intimately related," it is by no means certain that Rough for Radio I and Rough for Radio II are, as he claims, "preliminary sketches" for the other plays.²⁵ Manuscript evidence shows that Beckett started the first draft of Words and Music on 20 November 1961 and completed it two days later. He then wrote the first drafts of Rough for Radio I and Cascando in French, taking two days (29-30 November) over the former and two weeks (1-13 December) over the latter. The manuscript of the fourth play, Rough for Radio II, is undated; however, there is reason to believe it was written some time in 1962.²⁶ Rough for Radio I may have been a preliminary sketch for Cascando, but it could not have served as such for Words and Music, since Words and Music predates it. Similarly, Rough for Radio II appears to have been written later than either Words and Music or Cascando, though its exact dates have never been established.

The four characters in Rough for Radio II--Animator, Stenographer, Fox and Dick--represent various components of an artist's mind. As Martin Esslin has observed, Animator is

the Critical faculty trying to shape the utterances of the voice that emerges from the subconscious, while the stenographer is the recording faculty and, also, . . . the artist's conscience; Dick, the torturer, is the artist's determination to stimulate his subconscious by suffering; the stenographer's disrobing and kissing of Fox represents analogous attempts to stimulate the subconscious by erotic

fantasies.²⁷

The sense we have as we listen to the play on radio is that the radio itself is a head, and that an old and enfeebled artistic mind resides within it. Animator complains about the lack of variety in Fox's descriptions, thereby implying that Fox (surely a pun on "Vox" --voice--as Esslin suggests)²⁸ has been alternately tortured and enticed into speech over a long period. Though Animator would like to think that the mind is near its goal, it would appear from the four characters' weariness and overall pessimism that death may intrude before it is reached.²⁹

What this goal might be is not immediately clear. At the start of the play a report on "yesterday's" session with Fox is read, in which "We the undersigned . . . note yet again with pain that . . . these dicta, like all those communicated to date and by reason of the same deficiencies, are totally unacceptable [sic]" (RRII, p. 116).³⁰ Whether "we the undersigned" comprise the artist's audience or a group of professional critics, or even some portion of the artist's own mind, is never specified; all we learn is about this anonymous group is that it has issued three "standing exhortations" relating to Fox. The first is that the Stenographer is not to record Fox's "mere animal cries"; second, she is to provide a "strictly literal transcript" of what Fox says, since "the meanest syllable has, or may have, its importance"; third, the interrogation team is to keep Fox gagged when not in session, for the "least word let fall in solitude . . . may be it--three words underlined" (RRII, p. 116).

The third exhortation is one of a number of hints in the play that Animator, Stenographer and Dick have been charged with getting Fox to utter the word or words that will bring the obligation to

speak to an end. "Be reasonable, Fox," says Animator elsewhere. "Stop . . . jibbing. It's hard on you, we know. . . . You might prattle away to your latest breath and still the one . . . thing remain unsaid that can give you back your darling solitudes, we know. But this much is sure: the more you say the greater your chances" (RRII, p. 121). Evidently Fox has only to say the right word or words to be released from his sessions with the other three characters, who are just as eager for release as he is. At the end of the unsuccessful session with which the play is concerned, the Stenographer begins to cry, and Animator comforts her by saying "Don't cry, miss, dry your pretty eyes and smile at me. Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free" (RRII, p. 124).

Animator begins the session by asking the Stenographer to read aloud Fox's last words the day before:

S: [Reading.] 'When I had done soaping the mole, thoroughly rinsing and drying before the embers, what next only out again in the blizzard and put him back in his chamber with his weight of grubs, at that instant his little heart was beating still I swear, ah my God my God.'
 (RRII, p. 117)

This rather curious passage contains two elements common to all Fox's utterances: first, the fleeting impression of a hostile surface environment where life is threatened; second, the impression of a safe underground environment accessible not only to burrowing creatures but to men as well. The two impressions are important, for they come together in the play to suggest that introspection is a kind of subterranean escape from the harshness of the everyday world.

But just as the earth is resistant to burrowing, so the mind resists self-examination. From past experience, Animator has learned that material cannot simply be forced out of it; hence his policy of

reducing rather than increasing pressure on Fox--the voice of the mind's innermost recesses--as the session proceeds. At first, all that Animator manages to extract from him is an exasperatingly familiar description of a bleak, stony landscape riddled with tunnels; it is only later that Fox speaks of

. . . my brother inside me, my old twin, ah to be he and he--but no, no no. [Pause.] No no. [Silence. Ruler.] Me get up, me go on, what a hope, it was he, for hunger. Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck if he's still alive, ah but no, no no. [Pause.] No no. (RRII, p. 119)

This surreal passage begins to make sense once it is recognised that Beckett is alluding in it to Tennyson's "Maud." Tennyson's poem is narrated in the first person by a young man who is mad, and who at one point imagines that he has been buried alive in a shallow grave.³¹ "He is the heir of madness," says Tennyson, "an egotist with the makings of a cynic, raised to sanity by a pure and holy love [for Maud] which elevates his whole nature."³² Similarly, Fox imagines that he has a twin living inside him like a foetus in a womb, and that once this brother has been surgically removed, he can be breast-fed by a woman named Maud. Fox's last words in the play, "Let me out! Peter out in the stones!" (RRII, p. 121), suggest that he identifies with the twin inside himself, and is expressing a wish to die. The prospect of loving Maud is not for him, as for Tennyson's character, a means of escape.

Animator, by contrast, appears to place implicit faith in love, for he insists on changing Fox's story to read "'Have yourself opened, Maud would would say, between two kisses, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck if he's still alive, ah but no, no no'" (RII, p. 124; my italics). These words, never uttered by Fox

before, are, Animator hopes, the ones that will appease the mysterious "we the undersigned" and bring the obligation to speak to an end. As audience, however, we are aware that the phrase "between two kisses" is spurious, and the question remains for us as to what the key words really are. The play provides so little information about them that we can only guess, though there seems to be a clue in Fox's image of the twin within himself, which may be taken to be an image of the Self. The mind's investigation of the nature of the Self is of course the subject of The Unnamable, whose unnamed narrator seeks in vain the words that will say "I"--that will describe the Self successfully. As in that novel and in Cascando, the search is unending, for the words in question lie beyond the limits of human knowledge: in Rough for Radio II, Beckett hints very strongly that Fox will only be released from his torture, and the other three characters from their daily sessions with him, by a single, inevitable event--the death of the mind the play represents.

Beckett's interest in the unknowability of the mind is less fully developed in Rough for Radio I than in Rough for Radio II; however, the former is of interest for what it reveals about his approach to dramatic technique. In this play we have the sense that the characters are meant to be flesh-and-blood people, and that the setting is a building rather than the interior of a skull. Martin Esslin has suggested that it is set in a radio studio,³³ and there is some evidence to support this; however, there are also indications that the setting is the interior of a house inhabited by the main character, who is initially referred to only as "He." At the start of the play, a visitor identified only as "She" arrives and asks, "May I squat on this hassock?" (RRI, p. 107);³⁴ after a pause, she

says "Thank you" in reply to what the reader takes to be He's nod of assent.³⁵ Elsewhere, She asks whether the heat and light might be turned up, and asks also whether the rug she catches sight of is a "Turkoman" (RRI, p. 109). As She leaves, He gives her directions: "To the right, madam, that's the garbage--[Faint stress.]--the house garbage" (RRI, p. 109).

During her visit, She is surprised to learn that He spends his days seated next to a pair of radios, or loudspeakers, listening to the voice of a solitary man on the one, and to a group of musicians on the other. In the English text, it is not clear whether the voice and music are live or recorded; in the French text, He emphasises that they are live.³⁶ What the solitary voice says is never revealed to us, for Beckett has never assigned words to the part. Nor has he arranged for music to be composed for broadcast; the play is unfinished, has never been performed, and probably never will be.³⁷

From He's dialogue with She it emerges that He listens to the voice and music because He has developed "a need" (RRI, p. 109) for them. How intense that need is becomes clear after She has left; first there is a long pause, then the sound of curtains being "violently drawn" (RRI, p. 109) as He prepares to make a phone call to his doctor. Unfortunately the doctor has been called away, and as He (whose name, we discover is Macgillicuddy)³⁸ waits for the doctor to return his call, he becomes more and more agitated. Finally the doctor phones, and Macgillicuddy reports two unsettling developments: first, the voice and music appear to be coming to an end; second, they seem to be coming together, even though the speaker and musicians are isolated from each other.

Beckett provides so little information about Macgillicuddy and his eccentric "need" that we can only speculate about why the changes should precipitate a panicky call to his doctor about them. In the course of his phone conversation, Macgillicuddy hints that the voice and music are important to him as a substitute for real human companionship: "I tell you they're ending . . . ENDING . . . I can't stay like that after . . . who? . . . but she's left me . . . ah for God's sake . . . haven't they all left me?" (RRI, p. 110). Evidently the substitute has become more satisfactory than the real thing, for although She takes a friendly interest in him, Macgillicuddy makes it clear that he is less than enthusiastic about her visit and that he is glad to see her leave.

If Beckett had provided words for the voice, it would be easier to understand Macgillicuddy's predicament. Without words--and indeed, without music either--it is impossible to determine why he feels the need to shun the world and spend his time listening to the words and music provided by a single voice and a group of musicians. The play suggests that Macgillicuddy's mind works in mysterious ways, but goes no further. Macgillicuddy's preference for the solitary life puts us in mind of earlier Beckett characters--Krapp, Molloy and Moran, to name only three. Macgillicuddy may, like them, be a writer who finds that a minimum of direct contact with other people is essential to his art; the voice and music he listens may be a counterpart to the inner sensations to which Molloy in particular attends as he writes. All this is, however, unclear in a play that Beckett abandoned unfinished. Evidently he felt that the basically naturalistic technique he employed in Rough for Radio I was not as well suited to his theme of the unfathomability of the human mind as

the expressionistic technique he employs in his other three radio plays of this period. In all three, significantly, the radio becomes a head for the audience, and the voices of the characters the components of the mind within it.

Like Macgillicuddy, Cascando's central character, Opener, spends his time listening to a voice and to music. He can turn one or both down to the point of inaudibility, or bring them up to full strength as he pleases. In this play, Voice and Music are characters, and Opener is careful to emphasise that they are quite separate from him; they are not simply sounds in his head:

OPENER: . . . What do I open?

They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open,
it's in his head.

They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they
don't see what I have, and they say, He opens nothing, he
has nothing to open, it's in his head.

I don't protest any more, I don't say any more,
There is nothing in my head.

I don't answer any more.

I open and close (C, p. 140)³⁹

But whereas in Rough for Radio I there is a clicking sound called for whenever the Voice or Music are turned on, no such sound is heard in Cascando. What this small detail suggests is that Opener is not the naturalistic character he initially appears to be. The fact that Opener operates soundlessly is a hint to us that, like the characters in Rough for Radio II, Opener, Voice and Music are the components of a single mind, Opener being the Self, and Voice and Music the mind's verbal and non-verbal aspects, respectively.⁴⁰ Beckett's comment that the play "does I suppose show in a way what passes for my mind and what passes for its work"⁴¹ may suggest that the play is meant to represent the workings of his own mind; however, its many allusions to earlier works of his (and especially to his trilogy of novels)

make it clear that, like these other works, Cascando is only semi-autobiographical.

Beckett's initial title for the play was Calando, a musical term meaning "diminishing in tone." He changed it to Cascando when officials in French radio, which broadcast the play for the first time, pointed out that "calendos" was French slang for cheese.⁴² "Cascando" is also a musical term, meaning "falling tone,"⁴³ and it is entirely appropriate to a play that is concerned, like the trilogy, with the inevitability of artistic failure. As in The Unnamable, the task confronting Voice is that of finding the words that will release him from the obligation to speak:

VOICE: [Low, panting] --story . . . if you could finish it
 . . . you could rest . . . sleep . . . not before . . .
 oh I know . . . the ones I've finished . . .
 thousands and one . . . all I ever did . . . in my
 life . . . with my life . . . saying to myself . . .
 finish this one . . . it's the right one . . . then rest
 . . . and finished it . . . and not the right one . . .
 couldn't rest . . . (C, p. 137).

The "low, panting" voice that speaks these words clearly issues from a mind approaching death; its powers are failing, partly as a result of the ravages of time, and partly through discouragement, for repeated attempts to find the right formula of words--to tell the right story--have been uniformly in vain.

Nevertheless, Voice returns to a story he has told before, the story of Woburn: "Woburn . . . I resume . . . he's changed . . . not enough . . . recognizable" (C, p. 137). Woburn, a "woe-burnt" figure wearing the "same old coat" (C, p. 137) as a variety of earlier Beckett characters,⁴⁴ first walks, then crawls through the mud:

VOICE: . . . he goes down [the slope] . . . falls . . . on
 purpose or not . . . can't see . . . he's down . . .
 that's what counts . . . face in the mud . . . arms spread
 . . . (C, p. 138).

Here Woburn puts us in mind of Macmann in Malone Dies, who similarly adopts a cruciform position in the mud for the purpose of expiating the original sin of having been born.⁴⁵ Since finding the words that will bring the need to speak to an end is in those works, as here, a kind of penance, Woburn's posture serves as a symbolic counterpart to the creative act.

The fact that Woburn eventually gets into an open boat and heads for an island recalls the endings of Malone Dies and "The End,"⁴⁶ as well as a passage in Molloy, where, as we saw in Chapter Seven, Molloy speaks of his "region":

. . . don't imagine my region ended at the coast, that would be a grave mistake. For it was this sea too, its reefs and distant islands, and its hidden depths. And I too once went forth on it, in a sort of oarless skiff, but I paddled with an old bit of driftwood. And I sometimes wonder if I ever came back, from that voyage. For if I see myself putting to sea, and the long hours without landfall, I do not see the return, the tossing on the breakers, and I do not hear the frail keel grating on the shore (M, p. 69).

In Molloy, the reefs and distant islands are a metaphor for Molloy's conscious mind, and the sea for his unconscious; the passage as a whole conveys that he has been "voyaging" introspectively all his life. Woburn similarly begins by heading for "the island" (C, p. 140), a mental landmark familiar to him from previous experiences of introspection, but then heads out to "open sea" (C, p. 142). In the past, he has always returned "to the village, to the inn" (C, p. 143), a metaphor for another familiar part of his mind. Now he wants to journey further into the depths of his mind--further to sea, as it were--than ever before, his destination being the point at which complete and absolute knowledge of his mind and its workings would be attained. From the trilogy, however, we are aware that such knowledge is impossibly elusive. There, as here, Beckett makes his

main characters partly autobiographical to suggest that the impossibility of gaining absolute knowledge about either the world or the mind is something that not only the characters, but that he and all of us must accept.

Unsurprisingly, the ending of Voice's story is inconclusive. Though Voice and Music ultimately come together to Opener's satisfaction, nothing is resolved: Woburn does not reach his destination--that is, absolute knowledge of his mind--and Voice's story remains unfinished.

VOICE: --nearly . . . just a few more . . . a few
 [Together.]

MUSIC: -----
 more . . . I'm there . . . nearly . . . Woburn . . .

 it's him . . . it was him . . . I've got him . . . nearly--

OPENER: [With VOICE and MUSIC, fervently.] Good!

VOICE: --this time . . . it's the right one . . .
 [Together.]

MUSIC: -----
 finish . . . no more stories . . . sleep . . . we're there

 . . .nearly . . . just a few more . . . don't let go . . .

 Woburn . . . he clings on . . . come on . . . come on--

 [Silence.] (C, p. 144)

If Voice had pictured Woburn arriving at his destination, the introspective struggles of the mind represented in this play would have been at an end, for the mind would have attained to the perfect self-knowledge that arrival at the destination represents. The inconclusiveness of Voice's story demonstrates, however, that absolute knowledge, whether of the world or the mind, is impossibly elusive, and that, as in the trilogy, the words can never be found that will eradicate the obligation to speak.

Neither Cascando nor Words and Music is the kind of radio play that would appeal to a mass audience. In fact, an audience research report conducted shortly after the BBC's first broadcast of Words in Music, on 13 November 1962, established conclusively that the play was not well received: it scored an appreciation index of 43, the lowest figure recorded for a Beckett production on the Third Programme.⁴⁷ It is not surprising that even the sophisticated radio audience that tuned in to Words and Music found it perplexing, for the play is densely packed with allusions; it embodies an unusual combination of the expressionistic and the medieval; and it requires that the listener be aware of Beckett's preoccupation with the unfathomability of the human mind, a preoccupation that surfaces near the end of the play in a less than immediately obvious form. Like the three other radio plays Beckett wrote at about the same time, Words and Music needs not only to be heard in performance but to be studied as a literary text if the significance of its complexities is to be fully appreciated.

As Clas Zilliacus has observed, Beckett offers various hints that the play is set in a castle, with one of the characters, Croak, acting as feudal overlord, and the two others, Words and Music, as entertainers permanently attached to Croak's household:

The mode of their attachment is unambiguous: they are, in Words' phrase, 'cooped up here in the dark.' At more or less regular intervals Croak visits them in their confinement, for such solace and entertainment as their art may provide. His artists address him [as] My Lord; the term of Beckett's French version is Milord, and that of a French MS. was Seigneur. Croak for his part calls them his comforts, balms, or dogs, as his temper prompts him. The master-and-servant motif familiar from other Beckett works here appears in recognizably feudal costume.⁴⁸

Zilliacus adds, however, that on closer examination, the setting of the play turns out to be not a castle but the interior of a mind.⁴⁹ The play's medieval element emphasises the nature of the relationship between Croak on the one hand and Words and Music on the other: as Martin Esslin suggests, Croak is the superior figure, the Self; Words is the mind's verbal component, and Music the non-verbal.⁵⁰ Each serves Croak in a different way.

Rather than being a young and virile warrior-hero, Croak is (as his name implies) an old man approaching death. He is a partly pathetic, partly comic figure, who despite his medieval aspect, derives not from Beckett's interest in the literature of the Middle Ages, as Zilliacus has claimed,⁵¹ but from his longstanding interest in Joyce's Ulysses, two of whose chapters, "Sirens" and "Cyclops," form a major source for the play. Words (in the form of conversation) are central to "Cyclops" and music (in the form of song) to "Sirens." These two chapters of a novel Beckett knows well provided him with material for use in Words and Music.

Beckett draws on "Cyclops" to set the tone of his play. In this chapter of Ulysses a nameless first-person narrator reports the conversation of a rather shabby group of Dubliners who have gathered together in a public bar; Joyce intersperses the narrator's comments with third-person passages phrased in high-flown, quasi-medieval language. The effect is mock-heroic, as the following excerpt illustrates:

 --Ah, well, says Joe, handing round the boose. Thanks be to God they had the start of us. Drink that, citizen.

 --I will, says he, honourable person.

 --Health, Joe, says I. And all down the form.

 Ah! Ow! Don't be talking! I was blue mouldy for the want of that pint. Declare to God I could hear it hit the pit of my stomach with a click.

And lo, as they quaffed their cup of joy, a godlike messenger came swiftly in, radiant as the eye of heaven, a comely youth, and behind him there passed an elder of noble gait and countenance, bearing the sacred scrolls of law, and with him his lady wife, a dame of peerless lineage, fairest of her race.

Little Alf Bergan popped in round the door and hid behind Barney's snug, squeezed up with the laughing, and who was sitting up there in the corner that I hadn't seen snoring drunk, blind to the world, only Bob Doran.⁵²

Though the medieval element in Words and Music is fully integrated into the dialogue, rather than being separately interjected into it, as in "Cyclops," it serves a similar, mock-heroic purpose. Croak, the governing faculty of an ageing, failing mind, summons his servants Words and Music not to perform an act of heroism, but to assist him in the humbler task of writing poetry and setting it to music. That the poetry and music will be less than great art is conveyed by the fact that Croak is a lord in decline, and that Words and Music, castle poet and minstrel, respectively, are named "Joe" and "Bob," after two of the low-life characters in the "Cyclops" episode, Joe Hynes and Bob Doran. It is appropriate that Words, the mind's verbal component, should bear Joe Hynes' name, for Hynes is distinguished from his companions by virtue of being "eloquent" (U, p. 315). Similarly, just as Bob Doran is highly emotional, so Music, as Martin Esslin has observed, represents "the non-verbal, non-articulated component of [the mind portrayed in Words and Music], the flow of the emotions themselves . . ."⁵³

Croak's name, the title of the play, and much else derive from the "Sirens" episode of Ulysses. Here Leopold Bloom listens as Simon Dedalus sings "Come Back, Martha! Ah Return Love"⁵⁴ to the assembled drinkers in a bar. "Through the hush of air," comments Joyce, "[his] voice sang to them, . . . touching their still ears with words, still

hearts of their each his remembered lives" (U1, p. 272). Like the others, Bloom is moved by the song, and asks himself why: "Words? Music? No: it's what's behind" (U1, p. 273). Bloom realises that it is neither the words nor the music that has touched him--neither the description of the lover's pain as he yearns for the return of Martha nor the melancholy tune to which it is set. Rather, it is the power the song has to evoke thoughts and feelings about his (Bloom's) situation--which includes a furtive correspondence with one Martha Clifford in compensation for the fact that his wife Molly is being unfaithful to him.

As Bloom listens to the song, his distress at Molly's infidelity leads to a more general reflection on the cruel inevitability of lovers being separated by death: "Cruel it seems. Let people get fond of each other: lure them on. Then tear asunder. Death. . . . Dignam. . . . Corncrake croaker: belly like a poisoned pup" (U1, p. 276). In this stream-of-consciousness passage Bloom brings together a number of events that have happened and thoughts that have occurred to him earlier in the day. Paddy Dignam has been buried; he (Bloom) has reflected that a certain Father Coffey has "a belly on him like a poisoned pup" (U1, p. 105), and has several times recalled that his own father died by poisoning himself. The phrase "corncrake croaker" is associated in his mind with Simon Dedalus, a man with a good singing voice ruined by overindulgence in drink. In "Words? Music? No: it's what's behind," is Beckett's source for the title of Words and Music; in the phrase "Corncrake croaker" is the name of the character Croak.⁵⁵

Beckett uses these and other allusions to Ulysses in the same way as he uses major allusions to various literary and non-literary

works in earlier plays--as points of departure for the creation of an original work. Croak is neither Simon Dedalus nor Leopold Bloom, though he is in some ways allied to both. He resembles Dedalus in that he has known better days; he is not, however, a naturalistic character in a novel, but rather the governing faculty of a mind presented to us in an expressionistic radio play. He resembles Leopold Bloom in that he finds the right combination of words and music highly moving; but unlike Bloom, who hears Simon Dedalus' song because he happens to be in the same pub when Dedalus is asked to sing, Croak deliberately summons Words and Music to entertain him.

Croak is thwarted in his desire for entertainment by the fact that Words is constantly in conflict with Music. Words would ideally like to speak on the topics set him by Croak without having his statements coloured by the emotion Music insists on providing, and for that reason he repeatedly tries to silence him. Music, by contrast, finds Words a useful complement to his compositions and often invites him to provide lyrics to the melodies he has created. On the few occasions when he drowns Words out, it is almost always because he has been ordered to do so by Croak. Croak's interest, however, is not in helping Music to triumph over Words, but in encouraging the two to come together as friends. What he wants is to bring the verbal and non-verbal components of his mind into a relationship productive of song. The particular song he yearns to hear is one whose marriage of words and music will give rise to pleasure on three topics that have hitherto given him pain: love, age and--mysteriously, for its significance is not immediately apparent--"the face."

Croak's pain when thinking of the first topic, love, is intensified, however, by Words' dispassionate approach to it. Asked to speak on this topic, Words formulates a quasi-Scholastic definition:

WORDS: [Orotund.] Love is of all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love. [Clears throat.] This is the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than in this. [Pause.]

CROAK: Rending sigh. Thump of club.

WORDS: [As before.] By passion we are to understand a movement of the mind pursuing or fleeing real or imagined pleasure or pain. [Clears throat.] Of all--

CROAK: [Anguished.] Oh! (WM, p. 128)⁵⁶

It is to assuage the anguish Words' detachment has caused him that Croak calls on Music to furnish some emotion. Music responds with "Soft music worthy of foregoing, great expression, with audible groans and protestations--'No!' 'Please!' etc.--from WORDS" (WM, p. 128). At Croak's insistence, Music drowns these protestations out; when Croak bids Words to resume, however, the latter persists in being cool and detached, and at Croak's command is silenced by Music again.

When Croak next calls upon Words, it is to demand that he speak on the subject of age. Words begins falteringly, but more emotionally than before, and as he composes a short poem on the topic, joins with Music and sings. The poem is a bleak description of old age and growing decrepitude which, though initially generalised, moves to the particular when it pictures an old man remembering a woman he once loved:

Age is when to a man
Huddled o'er the ingle
Shivering for the hag

To put the pan in the bed
 And bring the toddy
 She comes in the ashes
 Who loved could not be won
 Or won not loved
 Or some other trouble
 Comes in the ashes
 Like in that old light
 The face in the ashes
 That old starlight
 On the earth again. (WM, p. 131)

Croak is less interested in Words' description of the old man and the music than in what lies behind them. He has earlier spoken of having seen or imagined a face "on the stairs" (WM, p. 127), and it is in order to explore the poem's relationship to this experience more fully that he asks Words to describe the face in detail.

WORDS: [Disregarding, cold.] . . . Seen from above at such close quarters in that radiance so cold and faint with eyes so dimmed by . . . what had passed, its quite . . . piercing beauty is a little . . . blunted. Some moments later however, such are the powers of recuperation at this age, . . . the eyes widen to a stare and begin to feast again. [Pause.] . . . Now and then the rye, swayed by a light wind, casts and withdraws its shadow.

.

CROAK: [Anguished.] Lily! (WM, pp. 131-32)

Clas Zilliacus has argued that this is a "postcoital" scene, the aftermath of Croak's lovemaking years before with a woman named Lily.⁵⁷ Words' reference, however, to Lily's "powers of recuperation," and his comment that "a little colour comes back into [her] cheeks" (WM, p. 133) as she recovers herself, suggest instead that she has had a great shock, perhaps the shock of learning that Croak wants to bring their relationship to an end.⁵⁸

It is significant in this connection that Words echoes a song from the "Sirens" episode of Ulysses, "When the Bloom Is on the Rye":

My pretty Jane, my pretty Jane!
 Ah! never, never look so shy,
 But meet me, meet me in the ev'ning,

When the bloom is on the rye.

 But name the day, the wedding day,
 And I will buy the ring,
 The lads and maids in favors white,
 And village bells shall ring.⁵⁹

While the ballad describes fulfilment in marriage, the allusion to it in Words and Music suggests that Croak suffered a great loss in breaking with Lily and is now harrowed by a profound sense of regret.

Another song important in this context is "The Lily of Killarney," whose title almost certainly contributed the name "Lily" to the play. Joyce alludes to this song in Ulysses and quotes part of it in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

'Tis youth and folly
 Makes young men marry,
 So here, my love, I'll
 No longer stay.
 What can't be cured, sure,
 Must be injured, sure,
 So I'll go to
 Amerikay.

My love she's handsome,
 My love she's bonny:
 She's like good whisky
 When it is new;
 But when 'tis old
 And growing cold
 It fades and dies like
 The mountain dew.⁶⁰

Unlike "When the Bloom Is on the Rye," which takes a celebratory view of marriage, "The Lily of Killarney" is negative and spurning. If, as it seems, Croak did decide to break with Lily as a young man, it may have been because he believed that young love was not a proper basis for marriage, since it "fades and dies like/ The mountain dew." Another, quite different possibility is suggested, however, by the resemblance between Words' description of the recuperating Lily and

Krapp's account of the girl in the punt in Krapp's Last Tape. In picturing Lily to Croak, Words draws attention to the

--flare of the black disordered hair as though spread wide on water, the brows knitted in a groove suggesting pain but simply concentration more likely all things considered on some consummate inner process, the eyes of course closed in keeping with this, . . . the whole so blanched and still that were it not for the great white rise and fall of the breasts. . . . Some moments later however . . . the brows uncloud, . . . a little colour comes back into the cheeks and the eyes . . . [Reverently.] . . . open. (WM, pp. 132-33)

In its use of black and white imagery and its concentration on the girl's eyes, the above closely resembles the scene in Krapp's Last Tape where Krapp breaks off with a nameless girl:

I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [Pause.] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments--[Pause.]--after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened.
[Pause. Low.] Let me in.⁶¹

What these similarities suggest is that in writing Words and Music Beckett drew not only on two chapters of Ulysses but also on Krapp's Last Tape. The contrast of black and white allows him to achieve a striking visual effect in an otherwise exclusively aural medium, and in Krapp he has a useful model for Croak. In Words and Music it is implicit that, like Krapp, Croak chose as a young man to deny himself love in order to dedicate himself to art. Moreover, Beckett hints that Croak's decision to break with Lily had an intellectual as well as an emotional side to it by ensuring that, as in Krapp's Last Tape, black and white, light and dark are associated with the intellect and the emotions. That on an intellectual level (the intellect being represented both here and in Krapp's Last Tape by white and light),⁶² he is convinced that he was right to break with Lily is evident from his apparent unwillingness to halt Words'

"cold" description of her face. Croak prefers to dwell on the dispassionate side of his decision, and says nothing to encourage Music to drown out Words' description. On the other hand, it is also evident that, like Krapp, Croak is profoundly lonely, and on an emotional level (the emotions being represented by black and darkness) is all too aware of having made a mistake.

In old age he finds he is still obsessed with Lily, and experiences pain rather than pleasure when Words sets a poem to music on the subject of her reaction to the ending of the relationship:

WORDS: --the brows uncloud, the lips part and the eyes
 . . . [Reverently.] . . . open. [Pause.]

 [Trying to sing, softly.]
 Then down a little way

 Towards where . . .
 All dark no begging
 No giving no words

 To whence one glimpse
 Of that wellhead.

 [Pause. Shocked.] My Lord! [Sound of club let fall. As
 before.] My Lord! [Shuffling slippers, with halts. They
 die away. . . .] (WM, pp. 133-34)

Croak seems, like Krapp, to have explored the eyes--traditionally, the windows of the soul--of the woman he loved in order to gauge her reaction to the news that they were to part. Evidently he managed to get only a glimpse of the "wellhead" of thought and feeling from which that reaction issued. This of course is to be expected, for as Beckett emphasises in the other three radio plays of this period, as well as in earlier plays, the workings of another person's mind are ultimately unfathomable.

Croak, however, is not only barred from knowing what Lily thought and felt, but bars himself from even speculating on it,

finding the whole matter too distressing to contemplate. Where the dispassionate Words is shocked at his sudden departure, the reader or radio listener alive to Beckett's allusions to Joyce and to Krapp's Last Tape finds it entirely consistent with what has gone before. Croak has been presented mock-heroically throughout the play, like the characters in the "Cyclops" episode of Ulysses; we do not expect him to face up to unpleasantness if he can avoid it. Moreover, we have come to understand that he is quite possibly a failed artist whose sacrifice of love to ambition as a young man has, like Krapp's, been in vain. His departure at the end is an expression of profound regret over lost opportunities and his inability to compose, with the help of Words and Music, a song that will ameliorate his sorrow. That inability may derive from a lack of talent, or, more generally, from the mind's ultimate lack of control over the emotions it generates. It is entirely appropriate that Beckett, who has said that the key word in his plays is "perhaps,"⁶³ should end Words and Music by offering us these two possibilities.

5

Beckett's radio drama represents an interesting development in his art. His earliest play for radio, All That Fall, explores an aspect of the limits of human knowledge familiar from earlier works--the uncertainty of God's existence and benevolence--with great success in a medium that was unfamiliar to him when he wrote the play. Embers presents us with a character who has chosen to put love in place of God as a means to ordering his experience, only to find that it remains as complex and inexplicable as ever; while in his

last four radio plays, Beckett demonstrates his belief that the human mind is unfathomable. The radio medium appears to have appealed to Beckett as one in which it might be possible to explore the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge in new and different ways. His radio plays are of interest as experiments, but they are not major works, and it is perhaps unsurprising that since Words and Music, Beckett has written nothing more for radio--having found, perhaps, that he had done as much in the medium as he could.

NOTES

¹This and other information about Beckett's dealings with the BBC comes from Martin Esslin's "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting," Encounter, 45 (Summer 1975), 38-46.

²Ibid., 39.

³Quoted by Deirdre Bair in Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 474.

⁴The five plays are Embers, Rough for Radio I, Rough for Radio II, Cascando and Words and Music. For manuscript dates, see Richard Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 26, 44, 47, 80 and 94. The original French title of Rough for Radio I was Esquisse radiophonique; it was first published as such in Minuit, 5 (Sept. 1973), 31-35. After Beckett had translated the play into English, it was published as Sketch for Radio Play in Stereo Headphones, 7 (Spring 1976), 3-7; then as Radio I in Samuel Beckett, Ends and Odds (New York: Grove Press, 1976); and finally as Rough for Radio I in The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Radio II was first published as Pochade radiophonique in Minuit, 16 (Nov. 1975), 2-12, then translated as Radio II for inclusion in Ends and Odds; it appears as Rough for Radio II in The Collected Shorter Plays. In "Beckett's Rough for Radio," Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (February 1977), 97, Martin Esslin reveals that Beckett changed the title of Radio II to Rough for Radio to avoid confusion over the fact that it was to be broadcast on the BBC's Radio 3. Evidently Beckett thought it best to bring the titles of both Radio I and Radio II into line with Rough for Theatre I and Rough for Theatre II when his Collected Shorter Plays was published. Cascando was first written in French; for details of Beckett's English translation of it, and of his French translations of Embers and Words and Music, see the Bibliography.

⁵All quotations from All That Fall are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by ATF.

⁶Clas Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting (Ab8: Ab8 Akademi, 1976), p. 39.

⁷Beryl Fletcher, et al. make this point about Hardy in A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 81. In "Happy-Though-Married Hardy," Notes and Queries (August 1982), 348-49, R.E.R. Madelaine has shown that the reference Dan makes to "How to Be Happy though Married" Hardy (ATF, p. 38) is to Edward John Hardy, author of How to Be Happy Though Married: Being a Handbook to Marriage (London, 1885).

⁸See Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 34, n29, for a list of some of the critics who take this view.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰See David Alpaugh, "The Symbolic Structure of Samuel Beckett's All That Fall," Modern Drama, 9 (December 1966), 330, and Beckett and Broadcasting, pp. 34-35.

¹¹Though various critics claim that Dan is guilty of murder, it is never explicitly stated in the play that the child is killed.

¹²Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 446.

¹³"Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting," 41-42.

¹⁴"Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting," 42, and Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 76.

¹⁵All quotations from Embers are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by Em.

¹⁶"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. . . . But habit is a great deadener" (WG, pp. 90-91).

¹⁷Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach" (1867), in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, ed. Walter Houghton and G. Robert Strange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. 470.

¹⁸That Henry means he never stopped talking is clearer in his French translation of the play. Cendres, trans. with Robert Pinget, Lettres Nouvelles, 36 (1959), 4, has: "Une fois je suis parti en Suisse pour ne plus l'entendre la salope et là-bas j'ai parlé sans m'arrêter tout le temps."

¹⁹Percy Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford U.P., 1956), p. 1109. This anthology will hereafter be cited as Noyes. For a reading of Embers that relates the title to Stanza IX of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," see David Alpaugh, "Embers and the Sea: Beckettian Intimations of Mortality," Modern Drama, 16 (Dec. 1973), 317-28.

²⁰Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 86.

²¹See, for example, John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: a Study of his Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p. 97; Ludovic Janvier, Pour Samuel Beckett (Paris: U.G.E., 1966), pp. 126 and 129; and Clas Zilliacus, "Samuel Beckett's Embers: a Matter of Fundamental Sounds," Modern Drama, 13 (Sept. 1970), 217.

²²See, for example, G.C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: a New Approach (London: Dent, 1970), p.117, and Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p.109.

²³Louise O. Cleveland, "Trials in the Soundscape: the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett," Modern Drama, 11 (Dec. 1968), 278.

²⁴Macbeth.V.v.19-28.

²⁵"Beckett's Rough for Radio," 100.

²⁶See note 4.

²⁷"Beckett's Rough for Radio," 102.

²⁸Ibid., 101.

²⁹In "Beckett's Rough for Radio," 102, Esslin comments that "[Beckett] . . . felt, having heard the [BBC] production, that it had 'not come off.' He put the blame . . . on the script and thus on himself, although he felt that the production which made the Animator and his team start briskly and become more weary and discouraged as time went on should already have started on a high degree of weariness and despair."

³⁰All quotations from Rough for Radio II are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by RRII.

³¹See Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Maud" (1855), V, 11. 239-53, in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, ed. Walter Houghton and G. Robert Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. 104.

³²Tennyson, Memoir, I, 396, quoted in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 6.

³³"Beckett's Rough for Radio," 99.

³⁴All quotations from Rough for Radio I are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by RRI.

³⁵Interestingly, this passage does not appear in Esquisse radiophonique, Minuit, 5 (Sept. 1973), 31. Beckett seems to have inserted it into his English translation to enhance our sense that the play is set in He's house. It is the reader rather than the radio listener who assumes that He nods assent to She's request; Rough for Radio I has never been broadcast.

³⁶Compare RRI, p. 108, where She asks, " . . . Is it live? [Pause.] I ask you is it live," and He replies, "No, you must twist [Pause.] To the right," with Esquisse radiophonique, 31: "Elle.-- . . . C'est en direct?. (Un temps.) Je vous demande si c'est en direct. Lui.--(avec lassitude.) Mais bien entendu, madame."

³⁷See "Beckett's Rough for Radio," 97.

³⁸In Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 121, n13, Zilliaccus reminds us that the "McGillycuddy woman" is a fiction Otto Olaf bboggs creates

to tease his wife and daughters in More Pricks Than Kicks (p. 137); it may be that Beckett uses the name in the play, withholding it until nearly the end, for the sake of teasing the reader.

³⁹All quotations from Cascando are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by C.

⁴⁰Ruby Cohn lists some of the other suggestions critics have made as to what Opener, Voice and Music represent in Just Play: Beckett's Theater (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1980), p. 91.

⁴¹Quoted in Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 118.

⁴²See Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics (Berkeley/ Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 70. In Beckett and Broadcasting, pp. 116-19, Zilliacus points out that the Rumanian composer Marcel Mihalovici enlisted Beckett to write Cascando for French radio after he himself had been commissioned to write a musical score. Mihalovici composed the music after Beckett had completed work on the play.

⁴³See Beryl Fletcher, et al., A Students' Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 163.

⁴⁴The association of Woburn with "woe-burnt" has been made by a number of critics. In Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1973), p. 203, Ruby Cohn suggests that the name "Maunu" in the original French is to be associated with "naked miseries." Watt, Molloy and Macmann all wear the "same old coat"--the green greatcoat--that Beckett wore in the thirties (see Bair, p. 636.)

⁴⁵See MD, p. 239. Woburn is also reminiscent of the characters in How It Is, who spend the novel crawling across a muddy landscape.

⁴⁶The resemblance between the endings of Cascando and "The End" has been remarked on by a number of critics. But see also MD, pp. 285-86.

⁴⁷See Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 115.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁰"Beckett's Rough for Radio," 100.

⁵¹Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 105.

⁵²James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 296-97. All quotations from Ulysses are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by U1.

⁵³See Ulysses, pp. 298, 300 and 311 for instances of Bob Doran's emotional behaviour. The phrase from Esslin is from "Beckett's Rough for Radio," 100. I am grateful to Professors Mary Gerhardstein and Ellen Shields of the University of Waterloo (Canada) for reminding me that Joe Hynes also appears in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," where he recites a poem he has composed in honour of Parnell; and that a Mr. Doran (his first name is not given) figures in "The Boarding House." Doran has had an affair with the landlady's daughter, and wavers between two emotions--love for the young woman and the desire to remain unmarried. In Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 100, Zilliagus points out that in the earliest drafts of Words and Music, Words was called "Will" and Music "Louis"; Beckett changed their names in ink in the first typescript. Zilliagus also notes that in the first draft Croak was initially called "Old man's whisper," then "Whisper," then "Senile Croak," and finally "Croak."

⁵⁴For the words to this song see Zack Bowen, Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974), pp. 178-79.

⁵⁵For reasons that will become apparent, this passage in Ulysses is a more probable source for the title Words and Music than Yeats's collection of late poems, Words for Music Perhaps, first suggested as a source by John Pilling in Samuel Beckett (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 101.

⁵⁶All quotations from Words and Music are from Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, prefaced by WM.

⁵⁷Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 109.

⁵⁸It is convenient to use the name "Croak" to refer to the person whose mind is portrayed in the play, since that person's name is not given. However, it must be remembered that in the first instance, the name refers to the governing component of that mind.

⁵⁹Bowen, p. 163, quotes this song and identifies Joyce's allusions to it in the "Sirens" episode. See p. 372 for a list of Joyce's allusions to the song elsewhere in his work.

⁶⁰Quoted in Bowen, pp. 37-38. See p. 369 for a list of the places in Ulysses and A Portrait where Joyce either alludes to or quotes from this song. Beckett echoes the first of the two lines, "What can't be cured, sure/ Must be injured, sure" in Happy Days (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 10.

⁶¹Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 110, relates this passage from Krapp's Last Tape to the poem Words composes at the end of the play. The quotation from Krapp's Last Tape is from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 61.

⁶²As we saw in the last chapter, James Knowlson discusses the significance of the black/white, light/dark imagery in Krapp's Last

Tape in "Krapp's Last Tape: the Evolution of a Play, 1958-1975,"
Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 1 (Winter 1976), 50-65.

⁶³Quoted by Tom F. Driver in "Beckett by the Madeleine,"
Columbia University Forum, 14 (Summer 1961), 23.

CHAPTER TEN

STAGE AND SCREEN

1

In late 1960, about a year before beginning work on Words and Music, Beckett wrote the first draft of a stage play, Happy Days. He completed the final draft in the following year, and during the sixties wrote three further plays for the stage--Play, Come and Go and Breath--as well as a motion picture script, Film, and a play for television, Eh Joe.¹ All six of these plays are concerned, as Beckett's earlier works are, with the relationship between art and the limits of knowledge: Film, Come and Go and Breath focus on some of the epistemological and metaphysical questions that relate to how much it is humanly possible to know; while Happy Days, Play and Eh Joe are concerned with some of the psychological factors that can limit an individual's knowledge.

2

Beckett wrote Film at the invitation of his American publisher, Barney Rosset. Early in the sixties Rosset commissioned three original motion picture scripts on behalf of Grove Press: Film, Ionesco's Hard-Boiled Egg and Pinter's The Compartment. Beckett's script was, however, the only one to reach the cinema screen. The filming of Ionesco's Hard-Boiled Egg was postponed indefinitely, and

Pinter chose to adapt The Compartment to television as The Basement. Film was produced in New York in 1964 under the direction of Alan Schneider; Beckett was present on the set throughout to give advice.²

From Deirdre Bair's biography we know that Beckett thought seriously of becoming a professional film-maker as a young man. In 1936 he wrote to Eisenstein and Pudovkin to say that he would like to work with them, and told Pudovkin that he wanted to "revive the . . . two-dimensional silent film, which he felt had died unjustly before its time."³ To all appearances, Film is a fulfilment of that early ambition. Though written and produced in the sixties, it has much in common with the films of the twenties: it is silent; it is in black and white; it features Buster Keaton (Beckett had originally wanted Charlie Chaplin, but was unable to get him); it includes a certain amount of slapstick comedy; and it uses some of the devices pioneered by dada-surrealist film-makers of the day.⁴

Despite its element of slapstick, Film is an essentially serious work concerned with the relationship between perception and the limits of human knowledge. The fact that its epigraph, "Esse est percipi" (Fi, p. 11),⁵ is from Berkeley has prompted one critic, Sylvie Debevec Henning, to argue that the work is a kind of "dialogue" between Beckett and Berkeley about perception and, more importantly, self-perception.⁶ That self-perception is central to Film is evident from Beckett's prefatory notes:

All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.

Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception.

No truth value attaches to above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience (Fi, p. 11).

Beckett includes these statements in his prefatory notes, Henning argues, because he wants to make it clear that he does not accept Berkeley's views on self-perception. On the contrary, his purpose in Film is to expose a "weak spot" in Berkeley's epistemological theory.⁷

In his Principles of Human Knowledge, Berkeley says that "the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived . . . seems perfectly unintelligible. Their esse is percipi, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds . . . which perceive them."⁸ Film's O wants to attain to a state of nonbeing, and believes that to do this he must avoid being perceived by other people. But, says Henning, "[h]e must also eliminate God for, as Berkeley insists, 'all objects are eternally known by God, or which is the same thing, have an eternal existence in his mind'. . . . Yet, even after O has symbolically eliminated God the Father by tearing up [a print depicting His face], he remains anxious about the blank spot created on the wall by the representation's absence. And with good reason, for this is the spot into which E [Eye, the part of himself that engages in self-perception] steps at that crucial moment of investment. Self-perception replaces divine observation, it seems, and maintains O in being."⁹ The "weak spot" in Berkeley's argument, says Henning, is his failure to account satisfactorily for the possibility and importance of self-perception.¹⁰

Henning is right to point out that Beckett's interest in Berkeley plays a part in Film; her claim, however, that the work is a dialogue with Berkeley is less than convincing. If Film were such a dialogue, written with a view to exposing a flaw in the Bishop's

theory, it is surely odd that Beckett follows his own counterargument in the prefatory notes with the statement that "No truth value attaches to above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience." And if Beckett truly wanted to dispute Berkeley's views, it seems odd, too, that he chose to do so in a silent film instead of in an essay or a series of dialogues like his three dialogues with Georges Duthuit.¹¹

When we examine Film closely, it becomes apparent that the work is not a dispute with Berkeley, but a dramatisation of certain ideas deriving partly from Berkeley and partly from Schopenhauer. Beckett does not attach any "truth value" to these views, because he has no way of knowing infallibly whether they are true or not. His version of their beliefs is simply a "structural and dramatic convenience" useful to the creation of a silent film.

In The World as Will and Idea, Schopenhauer expresses repeated admiration for Berkeley, and puts forward an epistemological theory that is in some ways similar to the Bishop's.¹² As we saw in Chapter One, Schopenhauer believes that in every act of perception, the mind treats sense data as effect and tries to explain the cause by organising the data within a spatiotemporal framework. Space, time and causality are for Schopenhauer the three "forms" of perception without which sense data would remain in undifferentiated confusion. We may think that the world is no more than "idea"--that is, sense data perceived under the forms--but at the heart of everything in nature, Schopenhauer argues, is an imperceptible striving force, a force he refers to as "will." The whole world is simply objectified will: will resides in all animate and inanimate objects and is responsible for their phenomenal characteristics. It exists in man

as the will to live--the will to survive, propagate, seek pleasure and avoid pain. The will cannot be perceived, but it can be studied indirectly by way of introspection.

When Beckett says in his prefatory notes that his protagonist "is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit" (Fi, p. 11), he is echoing a passage in The World as Will and Idea, in which Schopenhauer says that when the mind engages in introspection, it

. . . falls asunder into subject and object. For . . . in self-consciousness the I is not absolutely simple, but consists of a knower, the intellect, and a known, the will. The former is not known, and the latter does not know, though both unite in the consciousness of an I. . . . [I]nner knowledge is free from two forms which belong to outer knowledge, the form of space and the form of causality, which is the means of effecting all sense-perception. On the other hand, there still remains the form of time . . . In consequence of the form of time which still adheres to it, every one knows his will only in its successive acts, and not as a whole, in and for itself . . . But yet the apprehension, in which we know the affections and acts of our own will, is far more immediate than any other. (WWI, II, 406-07)

By "affections of the will," Schopenhauer means "all striving, wishing, shunning, hoping, fearing, loving [and] hating" (WWI, II, 412)--in short, the whole range of will-motivated human emotion; "acts of the will" are the actions these emotions precipitate. Thus, in introspection the individual becomes conscious of the will's presence and activity within himself, though he is denied direct knowledge of the will itself. He is denied such knowledge because the will cannot be separated from the form of time; because the subject of the investigation, the intellect, is an unknowable aspect of will; and because the will often seeks to conceal the individual's baser motives from the intellect.¹³ Nevertheless, through introspection it becomes apparent to the sensitive individual

that he is fundamentally selfish: introspection gives rise to limited, but nonetheless painful, self-awareness.¹⁴

In Film it is clear that introspection is a painful experience for the protagonist. Until the end, "O is perceived by E from behind and at an angle not exceeding 45°. Convention: O enters percipi = experiences anguish of perceivedness, only when this angle is exceeded" (Fi, p. 11).¹⁵ By the "anguish of perceivedness" Beckett means the anguish of introspective self-awareness, which arises whenever E takes too direct an interest in O as a creature of will. E is not only an aspect of O, but is the introspective subject more generally, whose gaze inspires a similar "agony of perceivedness" (Fi, p. 16) in three other characters--the elderly couple and the frail old woman seen near the beginning.¹⁶ Significantly, the couple's pet monkey is indifferent to E, for it requires human intelligence to become aware of the will and to be pained by its "acts and affections." That E's perceptions are clearer than O's is consistent with the fact that E's vision penetrates beyond the world as idea to the desires and activities of the will (though not to the will itself).¹⁷

Schopenhauer holds that awareness of the will's selfish striving has traditionally prompted a certain kind of person--the mystic, of whatever persuasion--to turn away from the world and embrace a life of asceticism. Generally the mystic begins by dedicating himself to voluntary chastity and renouncing all worldly goods; ultimately he learns to welcome every "injury, ignominy, and insult" (WWI, I, 493) the world has to offer. As a result of his deliberate self-denial, he becomes progressively less aware of himself and of the world

around him--which for the extreme ascetic fades into "[N]othing"

(WWI, I, 532). "Life and its forms," comments Schopenhauer,

. . . pass before him as a fleeting illusion, as a light morning dream before half-waking eyes; . . . and like this morning dream, they finally vanish altogether without any violent transition. From this we can understand the meaning of Madame Guion when towards the end of her autobiography she often expresses herself thus: 'Everything is alike to me; I cannot will anything more; often I know not whether I exist or not.'" (WWI, I, 505)

Paradoxically, the experience of Nothing--of obliviousness both to the world at large and to oneself--is of great spiritual value, for it gives rise to "that peace which is above all reason, that perfect calm of spirit, that deep rest, that inviolable confidence and serenity" (WWI, I, 531) which mystics of varying cultures associate with Nirvana, reabsorption in Brahma, or union with God.

As we saw in Chapter four, Murphy experiences Nothing at the conclusion of his chess game with Mr. Endon:

. . . Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence . . . not of percipere but of percipi. His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to . . . the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing. (Mu, p. 168)¹⁸

Murphy attains to Nothing by way of imperfect dedication to asceticism. Early in the novel he is revealed as too weak to undertake voluntary chastity: though he want to deny himself the favours of his fiancée Celia, the will within him creates a craving for her, and it is in answer to this craving that he yields temporarily to her demand that he find work. His failure to cultivate indifference to worldly objects is clear from his attempt to defraud a tea-shop by paying for one cup of tea, but consuming

"1.83 cups approximately" (Mu, p. 60). His inability to welcome insult and suffering is revealed from his meeting with a Miss Dew: when her dog eats his biscuits--a circumstance a more dedicated ascetic would regard with indifference--Murphy protests loudly and rudely. His imperfect asceticism leads to an imperfect (and impermanent) experience of Nothing: having reached it by the wrong route, he has only a brief experience of inner peace before being thrust into a state of high agitation, in which state he dies.

Murphy is to all appearances an important source for Film. The novel consists of a number of "filmed" and "edited" scenes, and abounds in self-conscious flash-backs, close-ups and long-shots; at one point, Ticklepenny appears "as though thrown on the silent screen by Griffith in midshot soft-focus" (Mu, p. 132).¹⁹ In addition, the close-up in Chapter Eight of Celia's hand on the bannister, "gripping, then sliding a little, gripping again, then sliding a little more" (Mu, p. 108) anticipates the close-up of the flower woman's hand on the bannister in Film, and Murphy's sessions in his rocking-chair anticipate the final scene with O.²⁰

More important than any of the other resemblances between the two works, however, is the fact that, like Murphy, O tries to attain to Nothing--to "the absence," as Beckett says in the passage quoted above, "not of percipere but of percipi." O believes implicitly that if he can avoid both self-perception and perception by others, he will eventually achieve the sense of obliviousness and peace so highly prized by mystics. Yet his efforts are made to appear ludicrously misguided: throughout Film, he "storms along in comic foundered precipitancy" (Fi, p. 12), shunning contact with other people and evading scrutiny by E. When he arrives at his mother's

room, O goes to preposterous lengths to ensure that he will not be perceived by the cat, the dog, the goldfish or the parrot, and tears from the wall a print depicting God the Father. Troubled by the "eyes" of a manila folder, he turns it ninety degrees to avert their gaze.²¹

The folder contains seven photographs depicting O at various stages of his life. These he destroys for the sake not only of eliminating further pairs of eyes, but of symbolically putting to an end the person he once was--the will-motivated person who (as the photos reveal), spent a lifetime striving to do things: please his mother, get an education, raise a family and serve his country. Evidently he believes that obliterating these images of the past will take him a step closer to the experience of Nothing. But when "Investment proper" (Fi, p. 39) occurs, O is invested with neither the mystic's profound sense of peace nor with the sense of being united with God. Instead of becoming oblivious of his surroundings and of himself, O is, in the closing scene of Film, intensely conscious of being perceived by E, an aspect of himself. Significantly, E stands by the nail that formerly secured the picture of God the Father to the wall: here Beckett is suggesting that O has made an obsessive pseudo-religion of the pursuit of Nothing, and that he is ultimately denied the profound and genuine peace experienced by mystics because he has tried to attain to it in the wrong way. That O and E both wear an eye-patch makes it clear that Beckett's protagonist has been one-eyed--that he has been unable or unwilling to view his experiences in perspective.

Film is concerned with a character who seeks to shut out the world in order to gain access to the higher reality represented by

the experience of Nothing. He wants to keep the world at a distance, just as the eye of the camera keeps us, as audience, at a distance from the world portrayed on the screen. "The camera," Ruth Perlmutter has observed, " . . . frustrates direct contact with reality. . . . The screen is always the other, always a replica . . ."

²² Film is silent: the "sssh!" (Fi, p. 16) that announces this near the beginning not only demands that we devote our undivided attention to what we are about to see, but also suggests that certain cinematic conventions will be observed. Film's resemblance to various surrealist films of the twenties is no accident: like the surrealists, who devoted themselves to portraying dream images on screen, Beckett presents us with a character whose attempt to attain to Nothing is curiously dream-like. The dream-like quality of the work arises partly from the producer's use of a lens-gauze to make O's perceptions seem hazy and ill-defined, and partly from O's strangely eccentric behaviour, which remains unexplained by dialogue throughout. Significantly, O never awakes from his "dream" to the experience of Nothing as Madame Guion and the other ascetic mystics cited in Schopenhauer do.

Though Beckett makes interesting use of the cinematic medium in Film, the work is not an unqualified success. Film depends heavily on audience familiarity with the works to which Beckett alludes in order to be properly understood. Thus, the technical device of seeing out of focus through O's eyes, a device that arises from Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer, can be confusing to anyone unaware of that interest; the look that conveys the "agony of perceivedness" is open to misinterpretation; the forty-five degree camera angle--the angle of immunity--can seem arbitrary and strange;

and the central point revealed at the end, that the "pursuing perceiver is not extraneous, but self" (Fi, p. 11) may be lost altogether.²³

Alan Schneider's production of Film tends to obscure Beckett's purposes even further. Though experienced as a director of stage plays, Schneider had never before produced a film when he undertook the project, and he accidentally ruined the opening sequence, which for various reasons could not be reshot. The opening sequence sets the scene: a small factory district in 1929, on an early summer's morning, against which background appear two bicycles and a horse-drawn cab, followed by a number of people on foot, all walking in the same direction. Finally, "O . . . comes into view hastening blindly along sidewalk, hugging the wall on his left, in opposite direction to all the others" (Fi, p. 12). This scene is important, for its purpose is to establish that O is curiously out of step with everyone else, and hints that his activities in the film may well be misguided. Schneider was unlucky in having to omit the scene, and was unlucky, too, in failing to secure Charlie Chaplin as the actor to play O, for Chaplin's famous walk would have represented O's "comic foundered precipitancy" (Fi, p. 12) much more satisfactorily than that of the actor who did play the role, Buster Keaton. Keaton was baffled by Film, and only began to enter into the spirit of it when it was nearly over.²⁴

Though present when the production was made, Beckett was unable to offer a great deal of help. When interviewed on the set, he expressed his sympathy with the film crew: "I've made things a little difficult for them through ignorance. I've had no experience with film. This will be enough for some time."²⁵ It is perhaps

unsurprising that, despite the filmic potential afforded by Beckett's interest in Berkeley, Schopenhauer and various other philosophers, Film is his one and only script for the cinema.

3

The two stage plays Beckett wrote after Film, Come and Go and Breath, are both very short: the former takes about five minutes to perform, the latter thirty seconds.²⁶ In each, Beckett seems interested in the question as to how brief a play can be made and still convey to the audience something meaningful about the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.²⁷

Breath opens on a stage "littered with miscellaneous rubbish" (B, p. 211); a faint birth cry is heard, and the sound of air being inhaled. At the same time there is a slow increase of light, which begins to decrease as the air is exhaled; the light reaches a minimum of brightness at the end of the play, but is not extinguished. Clearly Beckett is presenting us with a variation on Pozzo's "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (WG, p. 89).²⁸ By lowering the light, but not extinguishing it, and by presenting us with two birth cries, Beckett dramatises the coming and going of successive generations of man, rather than the passing of a single life. The rubbish in the background may stand for any number of things; however, one possibility is that it represents the various metaphysical theories which have been advanced to explain, in Schopenhauer's words, "why the world exists, and is just the kind of world it is" (WWI, II, 360), but which have ultimately had to be

discarded because the world is too complex to admit of definitive explanation.

Come and Go presents us with a quite different situation: the meeting of three former school friends, Flo, Vi and Ru. "When did we three last meet?" (CG, p. 194) says Vi in the play's opening line; she is, of course, echoing the first line of Macbeth--"When shall we three meet again?"--though to what end is not clear. Like Endgame, Come and Go abounds in allusions to Shakespeare and (for so short a play), a surprisingly large number of other writers. Hersh Zeifman cites both Macbeth and Hamlet as sources for the play, pointing out that Ophelia's lament for her father contains the names of its three characters: "'There's rue for you; and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace a Sundays. . . . There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died' (IV.v.177-82). Flo(wer), Ru(e) and Vi(olet)--Beckett's three women," comments Zeifman, "bear the cryptic traces of Ophelia's death-flowers; the secret they share is embodied in their very names. . . . [E]ach of them is suffering from the same terminal disease, the inevitability of death."²⁹ Yet, sitting together "as [they] used to, in the playground at Miss Wade's" (CG, p. 194), the three women are also reminiscent of W.S. Gilbert's "three little maids from school";³⁰ of the Three Graces of Classical mythology; and of Olga, Masha and Irina, the main characters of Chekhov's Three Sisters.³¹ These and other allusive possibilities give rise to a variety of quite different interpretations of the meeting of three former school friends, their exchange of confidences and their joining of hands. What we make of the play varies according to which of the allusions we assign the prominence of figure and which the secondary importance

of ground. As Karen Laughlin has observed, "Come and Go fosters the coexistence--if not the clash--of diverse readings rather than allowing a preponderance of connections to converge toward the establishment of one, definitive meaning."³² Like Endgame, Come and Go is an insoluble puzzle: no single interpretation can account for it to the exclusion of all the others. It is a carefully crafted counterpart to the world at large, whose far greater complexities cannot be explained by reference to any single metaphysical theory.

While Breath and Come and Go are interesting experiments in dramatic minimalism, they are minor members of the Beckett canon--as is his first play for television, Eh Joe, written about a year after the shooting of Film.³³

4

Though Clas Zilliacus has noted that the camera dolly-in technique used in Eh Joe arose from Film, it is clear that in writing for a new medium, Beckett was anxious to avoid past mistakes.³⁴ Unlike Film, which demands that the audience make sense of certain arbitrary visual conventions--the forty-five degree angle of immunity, for example, and the use of a lens gauze to distinguish O's perceptions from E's--Eh Joe is technically straightforward. Apart from the opening scene, which presents Joe in his room attempting to shut himself off from the world, the play consists of a series of close-up shots of his face, as the camera moves nearer and nearer. Where Film baffles the audience with its silent refusal to explain what is happening, each of the nine camera moves in Eh Joe is marked by the resumption of a female voice--the voice of one of Joe's

former mistresses--intent on piecing together the story of how Joe drove another young woman to suicide.

Various features of the voice's story put us in mind of earlier Beckett works. The fact that the young woman who killed herself is described as the "green one" (EJ, p. 205), and is said to have strikingly pale eyes, recalls not only the girl "in a shabby green coat" in Krapp's Last Tape, but also the nurse with eyes "Like . . . chrysolite" (KLT, pp. 58 and 60). Like Krapp, Joe has broken off with the women who once loved him, and now contents himself with a prostitute; like Embers' Henry, he has for years heard voices in his head, including the voice of his father.³⁵ But whereas Henry actively summons voices to mind, Joe's former mistress makes it clear that Joe tries to stifle the voices he hears:

Camera move 2

You know that penny farthing hell you call your mind. . . . That's where you think this is coming from, don't you? . . . That's where you heard your father. . . . Isn't that what you told me? . . . Started in on you one June night and went on for years. . . . On and off. . . . Behind the eyes. . . . That's how you were able to throttle him in the end. . . . Mental thuggee you called it. . . . Otherwise he'd be plaguing you yet. . . . Then your mother when her hour came. . . . 'Look up, Joe, look up, we're watching you'. . . . Weaker and weaker till you laid her too. . . . (EJ, pp. 202-03)

Here it is hinted that the voices Joe hears (or has heard in the past) originate not in his mind, but in Heaven: they are, it would seem, the voices of the dead, who call upon him to look skywards to remind himself that they are watching him. It might appear that the voices have extra-worldly authority--that, like the heavenly voices that speak to traditional mystics, they utter incontrovertible truths. Yet, as Francis Doherty has observed, they differ from the

voices that spoke, for example, to St. Joan, in that they are voices which "haunt, taunt and paralyse" rather than comfort or console.³⁶

The reason Joe has killed his parents' voices, and is seeking to stifle the voice of the woman who speaks throughout the play, is that each voice either is or has been the unpleasantly condemnatory voice of conscience. His former mistress' voice goes round and round in his mind like the wheels of an old-fashioned penny farthing bicycle, insisting that he accept responsibility for the death of "the green one." But although the former mistress may be telling the truth about Joe's part in the girl's death, the absence of any other voices makes it impossible for us to examine a variety of viewpoints and decide whether she is distorting the facts or not.

In an interview conducted in Germany, Beckett commented that the voice "actually whispers in [Joe]. He hears it. . . . It is dead, but in him it lives. That is his passion: to kill the [voice] that he cannot kill."³⁷ If we could be sure that the former mistress speaks with God-like authority, we might feel that Joe has no business trying to stifle her voice. But if the voice is a construction of mind that is tormenting him with a false version of the facts--if it is limiting or distorting his knowledge of the past--Joe may seem justified in trying to kill it. It is by presenting a single voice in Eh Joe that Beckett invites us to consider the role the voice of conscience may play in placing limits on what we can know.

S.E. Gontarski has argued that the voice is, in Jungian terms, that of Joe's Anima or Shadow;³⁸ however, given the fact that Joe has been troubled in the past by the voices of his mother and father, it seems more probable that the successive voices he hears are meant

to represent stages in the development of his Freudian superego. As we saw in Chapter Eight, the superego, or conscience, is a component of mind that is shaped in childhood by the exercise of parental authority. Initially the individual's conscience takes on the character of his parents, in that it is the product of their values and prohibitions; Freud emphasises, however, that the parents' "personal significance . . . [gradually] recedes into the background," to be replaced by the influence of teachers, self-chosen heroes, loved ones and the like.³⁹

Joe's superego, it would appear, has most recently assumed the character of his former mistress, whose dead voice plays on the fact that Joe is a Christian and has a Christian's sense of sin:

Camera move 5

How's your Lord these days? . . . Still worth having? . . .
Still lapping it up? . . . The passion of our Joe. . . . Wait
till He starts talking to you. . . . Very fair health for a man
of your years. . . . Till one night. . . . 'Thou fool thy
soul'. . . . Put your thugs on that. . . . (EJ, p. 204)

The phrase "Thou fool thy soul" refers to the rich man in St. Luke's parable (12.16-21) who sees that it is wiser to accumulate spiritual rather than material wealth only when his soul is required of him by the Lord.⁴⁰ Joe, the voice is suggesting, should have thought earlier about the consequences of his behaviour to the young woman who killed herself. If he is now suffering the hell of remorse, there is much worse to come, for his Lord will ensure that he suffers eternally in the afterlife. Joe can put his thugs on (i.e., stifle) the voice that torments him during his lifetime, but will be unable to stop the voice that is to follow.

That Joyce's "A Painful Case" is a source for the play is suggested by the way in which the voice describes the death of the

young woman Joe abandoned. In Joyce's story a character named Mr. Duffy breaks off his friendship with a Mrs. Sinico, only to read in a newspaper some two years later that loneliness has driven her to alcoholism and a squalid death under the wheels of a train. Similarly, in Eh Joe, the death of the young woman is announced in a newspaper, the "[Irish] Independent" (EJ, p. 205). No details of the way in which she died are given there, however; these are supplied by the voice instead:

. . . Gets the tablets and [goes] back down the garden and under the viaduct. . . . Takes a few on the way. . . . Finishes the tube. . . . Scoops a little cup for her face in the stones. . . . Face in the cup. . . . Lips on a stone. . . . Taking Joe with her. . . . And the hands. . . . What are they fondling? . . . Till they go. . . . There's love for you. . . .
Eh Joe? . . .
[Voice and image out. End.] (EJ, pp. 206-07)

This, of course, is the voice of conscience imagining a scene that Joe has not actually witnessed. Whether Joe is responsible for her death is, however, unclear, for it may be that the young woman took her love for him too seriously and killed herself when the balance of her mind was disturbed. The problem is that it is uncertain whether the one voice in the play is incontrovertibly truthful.⁴¹ Beckett's purpose in the play is to suggest that the voice of conscience may be responsible for significantly limiting or distorting Joe's knowledge of the past, and (in differing circumstances) human knowledge more generally.

The television medium is well suited to this purpose. As Roger Brown has observed, television excels at "bringing out the full force of a tense dramatic situation seen in close-up in the faces of protagonists . . . boxed in by the smallness of a room."⁴² Joe's face is the only one we see in Eh Joe, and as the stage directions

tell us, it remains " . . . [p]ractically motionless throughout, eyes unblinking during paragraphs, impassive except insofar as it reflects mounting tension of listening" (EJ, p. 202). In a German production of Eh Joe in which Beckett was involved, Joe's facial expression changed slightly at the end of the play: a little sneer appeared on the actor's face and remained there for the fadeout.⁴³ The voice of Joe's former mistress--the voice of conscience--would probably claim this change of expression as evidence of Joe's callous lack of remorse. However, the situation is an ambiguous one, and it is also possible to argue that the sneer is expressive of contempt for a conscience that is overzealous in its condemnation of his behaviour.

5

In Happy Days and Play Beckett is concerned, as in Eh Joe, with the effect that certain psychological mechanisms or states of mind can have in limiting the extent of our knowledge. Optimism is the state of mind he focuses on in Happy Days: here he creates an artificial, cruel and arbitrary world in order to investigate the limitations that making the best of things places on the extent of what we can know.⁴⁴ Given his longstanding interest in Schopenhauer, it may well be that Beckett had the following passage from The World as Will and Idea in mind when he wrote the play:

If . . . we should bring clearly to a man's sight the terrible sufferings and miseries to which his life is constantly exposed, he would be seized with horror; and if we were to conduct the confirmed optimist through the hospitals, infirmaries, and surgical operating-rooms, through the prisons, torture-chambers and slave-kennels, over battlefields and places of execution; if we were to open to him all the dark abodes of misery, where it hides itself from the glance of cold curiosity, . . . he, too, would understand at last the nature

of this 'best of all possible worlds.' For whence did Dante take the material for his hell but from this our actual world? (WWI, I, 419)

The world of Happy Days resembles Dante's hell in that it is a place that is fashioned from our actual world, and is inhabited by individuals who suffer varying degrees of torment. The play's main character, Winnie, is in the first act buried up to her waist in a mound of earth, and in the second, up to her neck. Her husband Willie lies behind her, sometimes retreating from the blazing sunlight into a hole in the mound, but for the most part remaining outside it. The sun is so hot that it can set a parasol alight, yet threaten only one character--Willie--with sunburn, leaving the blonde and exposed Winnie (arbitrarily) unscathed. Similarly, though Winnie is sucked into the earth by the apparently ever-increasing pull of gravity,⁴⁵ Willie is free at all times to move about at will (which is one reason, perhaps, why he is called Willie). Again, it is only Winnie who is awakened, like a Pavlovian dog, by the sounding of the offstage bell; Willie always sleeps through it.

The world of the play is a timeless world, where to use terms like "hours" and "days" is "to speak in the old style" (HD, p. 19)--the style one would associate with life on earth, rather than with life in the private hell Beckett has constructed.⁴⁶ The fact that nothing ever changes--that Winnie can be sure that her parasol and other belongings will be restored to her "tomorrow" (and the next "day" and the next)--suggests that the play's two characters suffer endlessly, like Sisyphus, who is obliged to roll a rock repeatedly to the top of a hill, only to have it roll down again. If there were a third act to Happy Days, it would probably return us to the situation in which Winnie finds herself at the beginning of Act I.⁴⁷

While Winnie may not believe that hers is the "best of all possible worlds," she is nevertheless a "confirmed optimist" in the sense that she habitually makes the best of things. Despite the wretchedness of her situation, she is grateful to a merciful God for ensuring that it is not worse. At the beginning of Act II, for example, she says it is a "great mercy" (HD, p. 38) to be spared knowing whether Willie has left her; more generally, she is glad to be spared full knowledge of the nature of her situation. Winnie can only guess why she suffers as she does, and she is glad that the reasons for her suffering have not been made clearer.

Beckett originally thought of calling Happy Days "Tender Mercies," "Many Mercies," or "Great Mercies," no doubt with various Biblical sources in mind.⁴⁸ Any one of these titles would have been ironic (as the title Happy Days itself is), for in the final version of the play, it is clear that if God exists, He is a not altogether merciful figure. In Act II, when Winnie says "My neck is hurting me! (Pause. With sudden violence.) My neck is hurting me! (Pause.) Ah that's better" (HD, p. 44), we have a momentary sense that God has intervened to alleviate her pain, and that Winnie is right to think that her prayers are "perhaps not for naught" (HD, p. 12). Elsewhere, however, God appears to be cruel--as, for example, when Winnie complains that the bell that jolts her awake "hurts like a knife. . . . A gouge" (HD, p. 40). Here the God of Happy Days not only refuses to relieve her pain, but makes it impossible for her to pray for mercy by having the bell ring every time she closes her eyes to do so.

Winnie is apparently being punished for her sins, though what she has done to merit her punishment is never made clear. By

contrast, Willie's interest in obscene postcards and his many suggestive comments suggest that, like his namesake in Robert Burns's "Holy Willie's Prayer," he is guilty of the sin of lechery.⁴⁹ In the opening lines of the poem, Burns's Willie stresses that God is wholly arbitrary in His behaviour to His creatures:

O Thou, wha in the Heavens dost dwell,
 Wha, as it pleases best Thyself',
 Sends ane to Heaven and ten to Hell,
 'A for thy glory,
 And no for any guid or ill
 They've done afore Thee!⁵⁰

Similarly, in Happy Days Beckett implies that if there is a God, He often punishes the innocent and spares the guilty: though capable of occasional mercies, He is for the most part arbitrary and cruel.

Winnie has occasional doubts about God's attitude to His creatures, and remarks at one point on His apparent habit of playing unpleasant "little jokes" (HD, p. 24) on them. One such joke arises from the unexpected appearance of an ant on the mound.⁵¹ The fact that Winnie uses the archaic term "emmet" (HD, p. 23) in referring to the ant suggests that Beckett had Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy in mind when he wrote the play, for Burton has this to say about making the best of things:

Our villages are like mole-hills, and men as so many emmets, busy, busy still, going to and fro, in and out, and crossing one another's projects. . . . Some few amongst the rest, or perhaps one of a thousand, may be Jove's favourite, in the World's esteem, the white hen's chick, an happy and fortunate man, because rich, fair, well allied, in honour and office; yet peradventure ask himself, and he will say that, of all others, he is most miserable . . . It is not another man's opinion can make me happy; but, as Seneca well hath it, he is a miserable wretch, that doth not account himself happy; though he be Sovereign Lord of the world, he is not happy, if he think himself not to be so; for what availeth it what thine estate is, or seems to others, if thou thyself dislike it?⁵²

According to Burton, happiness is a function not of the individual's circumstances but of his state of mind, and this of course is entirely consistent with Happy Days: Winnie is subject to various forms of adversity, but remains cheerful throughout. She is less interested in discovering the truth about why she is suffering than in ensuring that she remains happy. As a deluded optimist who refuses to face up to the unpleasantness of her situation--who imposes her own limits on the extent of her knowledge--she attracts our contempt, just as she would surely attract Schopenhauer's. Yet she also attracts our sympathy for the efforts she makes to prevent herself from subsiding into despair.

Winnie's most obvious defence against despair is her daily routine, which includes praying, brushing her teeth, combing her hair, putting on her makeup and so on. She sustains herself partly through Habit, the all-important Proustian "compromise" (P, p. 18) the individual effects between himself and his environment.⁵³ Like B in Act Without Words II, Winnie has worked out a routine that fills her day and keeps at bay any melancholy thoughts she may have about her situation. In "Proust" Beckett describes Habit as "the Goddess of Dullness" (P, p. 33), and so dreary is much of what Winnie does and says that the phrase might be applied to her as well; throughout the play, she engages our sympathy nevertheless.

One of Winnie's greatest fears is that she will be left with nothing more to say or do and hours to run before the bell for sleep sounds, for in silence, without little tasks to perform, it would be very difficult for her to keep pessimistic thoughts at bay. She solves the problem of finding things to talk about by varying the subjects to which she addresses herself: at times she comments on

her present situation, and at other times recalls various scenes from the past. For much of the play she talks to Willie, and at one point tells him a story about a little girl called Mildred, who is frightened by a mouse. Her incessant chatter keeps her occupied, and the presence of Willie is a source of comfort to her.

Another source of comfort is the literature of the past, though her recollection of specific passages is often faulty. It is "wonderful," she says, that "a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day" (HD, p. 43). S.E. Gontarski has pointed out that Winnie's imperfect quotations from such authors as Shakespeare, Milton, Gray and Keats are such an important part of the play that when it was first performed, Beckett prepared a careful list of their sources for use by the director, Alan Schneider.⁵⁴ Significantly, Winnie's use of these quotations serves to divide our sympathies. As elsewhere in the play, we feel contempt for her "pernicious and incurable optimism" (P, p. 15)--her unwillingness to face up to the horror of her situation; yet we also sympathise with her efforts to find solace in the wisdom of the past.

Two of Winnie's quotations are from Milton, and are obviously religious in character. She opens Act II with the first words of Book III of Paradise Lost, "Hail, holy light" (HD, p. 37), just as earlier she speaks of the "holy light, . . . blaze of hellish light" (HD, p. 11) that streams down on her from the blazing sun overhead.⁵⁵ While Winnie finds the light "hellish" in the sense of being uncomfortably bright and hot, she is glad that it is not brighter and hotter, and feels grateful to God for His mercy.⁵⁶ Earlier she tries to remember a line from Book X of Paradise Lost: "What is that wonderful line? . . . Oh fleeting joys-- . . . oh something lasting

woe" (HD, p. 13). Here she is alluding to Adam's "O fleeting joyes/ Of Paradise, deare bought with lasting woes."⁵⁷ Though Adam laments the fact that he and Eve have been cast into the wilderness for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Milton makes it clear that the punishment is just, since God warned them in advance that the fruit was not to be consumed. But if it is the thought that God behaves fairly to man that makes the passage attractive to Winnie, her own situation suggests that His fairness is illusory, for there is no clear indication in the play as to why she is being punished. Since Winnie is not guilty of any obvious sin, it may simply be that the God of Happy Days takes pleasure in tormenting His creatures, or alternatively, that He enjoys punishing Winnie and all mankind for "the original sin of having been born."⁵⁸ Winnie, of course, is oblivious of such possibilities as these: she prefers to think that in general, God is benignly disposed to man.

Some of Winnie's other quotations are from Shakespeare, and have a bearing on her relationship with Willie. Her first Shakespearean allusion occurs in Act I, where she says "what are those wonderful lines--(wipes one eye)--woe woe is me--(wipes the other)--to see what I see" (HD, p. 11). This is an echo of the speech in Hamlet in which Ophelia gives voice to her distress over Hamlet's madness:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;

 [And] I, of ladies most deject and wretched, . . .
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
 That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth
 Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me,
 T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see!⁵⁹

Here Winnie takes pleasure in Ophelia's recollections of a handsome, accomplished prince, a man who, prior to his madness, forms a

striking contrast to Willie. Winnie would like to think well of her husband, but is dismayed at his lack of interest in her: "Oh I know you were never one to talk, I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth only titbits from Reynolds' News" (HD, p. 46).

That Winnie is making the best not only of a harsh environment, but of an unsatisfactory marriage, is even clearer in the light of her brief allusions to Romeo and Juliet and Twelfth Night.⁶⁰ Her muttered "Ensign crimson . . . Pale flag" (HD, p. 14) as she applies her makeup is an echo of Romeo's speech in Juliet's tomb: "beauty's ensign yet/ Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,/ And death's pale flag is not advanced there."⁶¹ Though Winnie is pleased to see that she still retains a certain youthful beauty (the stage directions tell us that although fifty, she is "well-preserved" (HD, p. 9)), the reader or theatre-goer is nevertheless aware that she is past the first flush of youth, and that the hopes and dreams of young love will probably always be denied her. When she says in Act II that there is "no damask" (HD, p. 39) in her cheeks, she is echoing the passage in Twelfth Night in which Viola tells Orsino of a young woman who concealed her love for a man: "She never told her love,/ But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,/ Feed on her damask cheek."⁶² In contrast to the young woman referred to here (Viola is actually speaking of herself), Winnie has not wasted away because her love for Willie has been unrequited. She has always made the best of her situation; the fact that there is "no damask" in her cheeks is simply another indication that she is no longer young.

There is a further indication of the depth of Winnie's optimism in Act I when she echoes a line from Thomas Gray's "Ode on a Distant

Prospect of Eton College": "what is that wonderful line . . . laughing wild . . . something laughing wild amid severest woe" (IID, p. 25). In the poem Gray gazes at some boys on the playing fields of Eton, and reflects on the misery that lies ahead of them in adult life:

The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow;
And keen Remorse with blood defiled,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.⁶³

"Moody Madness laughing wild/ Amid severest woe" is not a state of mind we would ascribe to Winnie, for despite the unpleasantness of her situation, she remains cheerfully committed to making the best of things. It is impossible to imagine her in agreement with the epigraph to Gray's poem, a line from Menander reading: "I am [human], a sufficient excuse for being unhappy."⁶⁴ More appropriate to Winnie's unremitting optimism are the Ode's closing lines: ". . . where ignorance is bliss,/ 'Tis folly to be wise."⁶⁵ Winnie does not inquire too deeply into the cause of her suffering; she simply accepts that what "cannot be cured" (HD, p. 10) must be endured.⁶⁶

The two remaining quotations of any interest are from Yeats and Charles Wolfe. Winnie's "I call to the eye of the mind . . . " (IID, p. 43) in Act II echoes the opening line of Yeats's At the Hawk's Well, a play whose two main characters are denied the prospect of immortality offered by drinking water from a magic well. In Happy Days Beckett makes it clear that immortality (at least in the form in which Winnie and Willie experience it) is not--despite Winnie's insistent cheerfulness--something to be desired. Winnie accepts

immortality as an unalterable condition of her existence, and turns again and again to the literature of the past for comfort. "What are those exquisite lines?" she asks near the end of the play. "Go forget me why should something o'er that something shadow fling . . ." (*HD*, p. 43). The lines she is trying to remember are from Charles Wolfe's "Go! Forget Me":

Go! Forget me, why should sorrow
O'er that brow a shadow fling?
.
May thy soul with pleasure shine,
Lasting as the gloom of mine.⁶⁷

Winnie takes satisfaction in these lines, knowing that her soul is filled not with gloom but good cheer, and believing (perhaps mistakenly, though she is unaware of it) that she is a source of pleasure to her husband rather than a source of pain.

When not calling quotations to mind, Winnie busies herself by recalling scenes from the past, an activity in which Willie both helps and hinders her. Thus in Act I, for example, Willie prompts romantic memories of Charlie Hunter, only to undercut them:

WILLIE: [reading from newspaper] His Grace and Most
Reverend Father in God Dr. Carolus Hunter dead in
tub.
Pause.
WINNIE: (gazing front, hat in hand, tone of fervent
reminiscence). Charlie Hunter! (Pause.) I close
my eyes . . . and am sitting on his knees again, in
the back garden at Borough Green, under the horse-
beech. . . . Oh the happy memories! . . .
WILLIE: [reading from newspaper] Opening for smart youth.
(*HD*, p. 14)

Winnie wants to make a romantic scene of her memory of Charlie Hunter, but the romance evaporates with Willie's "Opening for smart youth." What he is implying, of course, is that Charlie Hunter was no more than a smart youth bent on seduction.

Throughout the play, Winnie prefers not to acknowledge human sexuality too directly.⁶⁸ Yet it is also apparent that she takes pleasure in being sexually domineering, as for example in Act I, when she says:

Go back into your hole now, Willie, you've exposed yourself enough. . . . That's the man. (She follows his progress with her eyes.) Not head first, stupid, how are you going to turn? . . . You have left your vaseline behind. . . . More to the right. (Pause.) The right, I said. (Pause. Irritated.) Keep your tail down, can't you! (Pause.) Now. (Pause.) There! (HD, pp. 20-21)

Clearly, this passage is not only a direction to Willie to get out of the sun, but is also (by way of various double entendres) a set of instructions as to how he should make love to her. Later in Act I, Winnie reminds Willie how he used to implore her to take his revolver away because he feared he might kill himself. Though it is not clear why Willie is suicidal, one possibility is that he has been driven to despair by a combination of Winnie's bullying and her unrelenting optimism.

At the end of the play, Willie emerges from behind the mound for the first time, "dressed," as the stage directions tell us, "to kill" (IID, p. 45). Whether this means that he intends to harm Winnie (assuming that is possible in an afterlife situation), or that he wishes to reaffirm their marriage vows (he is dressed as for a wedding) is ambiguous. Winnie, of course, takes the optimistic view, and in a transport of joy sings part of the Merry Widow Waltz:

Though I say not
What I may not
Let you hear,
Yet the swaying
Dance is saying
Love me dear!
Every touch of fingers
Tells me what I know,
Says for you,

It's true, it's true,
 You love me so! (HD, p. 47)

It may be that Willie's just audible "Win" (HD, p. 47) is a prelude to a renewed declaration of love, in which case Winnie's song is entirely appropriate to the circumstances. Yet it is also possible that Willie is announcing his intention to "win"--to bring to a victorious end the battle he has been fighting against her bullying and her irritatingly insistent optimism. He might do this by killing one or both of them with the revolver (assuming that is possible in the afterlife): what he intends is not clear.⁶⁹ In the light of what has gone before, it seems probable that Willie's intentions are less than loving, and if that is so, we feel in the end, as earlier, both sympathy for Winnie's unhappy condition and contempt for her efforts to make everything seem for the best. For as Beckett makes clear in Happy Days, an optimistic attitude can be seriously misleading: it can place significant limitations on the extent of what we can hope to know about both ourselves and the world we inhabit.

6

Beckett translated his next stage play, Play, into French as Comédie while he was still working on the English version, and it may well be that as he wrote it, he had another comedy--Dante's Divine Comedy--in mind.⁷⁰ Play's three characters, M[an], W[oman]1 and W[oman]2, are situated in a Dantesque afterlife reminiscent of Hell or Purgatory; their heads protruding from urns, the three are bathed not in the light of the beatific vision, but in that of an

inquisitorial spotlight, which prompts them to speak when it shines on them and relegates them to silence when it does not. Their physical situation and the fact that they speak of a bygone love affair suggests that, like Basil/Mahood in The Unnamable, they also derive from Keats's "Isabella," whose central character places the head of her murdered lover in a pot of basil.⁷¹ Beckett's counterpart to the pot of basil in Play is the spotlight's basilisk eye.

Unaware that the other two are present, each character provides us with a version of the affair that took place during their life on earth. Since Beckett wants to stress in Play that the three characters' subjectivity imposes a significant limitation on what they can hope to know about the conduct of the affair, a careful reading of the text is necessary to establish the sequence of events.⁷² The story begins with M and W1, who are apparently man and wife. W1 suspects her husband of infidelity with W2; M denies any involvement with her, but W1 dismisses his denial as a lie and has him followed by a detective, whom M bribes to remain silent. Frightened, however, by W1's threats to commit suicide, M confesses his guilt, and once she is aware of her rival's identity, W1 visits W2 to gloat. Then, to the surprise of both women, M disappears. W2, imagining that he has gone back to W1, burns his things; W1, believing he has left her for W2, calls at her rival's house, but finds it deserted. The affair is now at an end. How each character meets his or her death and comes to inhabit the afterlife depicted in Play is not explained: the published text suggests only that the three are obliged to remain where they are, repeating the story of their eternal triangle eternally.⁷³

In Happy Days, Winnie's knowledge of her situation is limited by her unrelenting optimism; similarly, in Play, the scope of each character's insight into the underlying causes of the affair is restricted by his or her insistence on representing what happened in the most flattering possible light. Thus, W1 refuses to admit that M has turned to another woman because she herself is in any way lacking: after meeting W2, she says she finds it impossible to understand "What he could have found in her when he had me" (P1, p. 150). Rather than entertain the possibility that there is something wrong with their relationship, she decides that her husband is motivated purely by lust. Thus, when she learns for the first time of M's infidelity, and confronts W2 with it, she screams: "I smell you off him . . . he stinks of bitch" (P1, p. 148); elsewhere, she refers to W2 as a "slut" and a "common tart" (P1, pp. 150, 151).

W2 emphasises to us that she behaves with greater self-restraint than W1. When W1 confronts her rival about her relationship with M, and hurls vulgar threats and abuse at her, W2 describes how she calmly rang for her servant Erskine and had W1 shown out. Again, in contrast to W1, who speaks disparagingly of W2's "Pudding face [and] . . . blubber mouth" (P1, p. 150) after their interview, W2 says of W1 only that "Her photographs were kind to her" (P1, p. 148). Throughout the play, she impresses on us that, far from being the "tart" W1 says she is, she is a lady who maintains a high standard of behaviour even in adversity.

M stresses that he did his best throughout the affair to avoid hurting either woman. When W1 first accuses him of being unfaithful to her, he denies it. But, he reports, "[s]he was not convinced. I might have known. I smell her off you, she kept saying. There was

no answer to this. So I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I am sure I did" (P1, p. 149). Though M would like to believe this is true, it is obvious that he is deceiving himself. We are not surprised when, later in the play, he reports W1 as saying "I ran into your ex-doxy, . . . you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for, I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart, I said, I am indeed. God what vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said" (P1, p. 151). Despite his infidelity and his callous behaviour to both W1 and W2 in disappearing without explanation, M presents himself in the best possible light: he even believes that he may have been responsible for bringing them together as friends after his death--as friends united in grief. "Perhaps they have become friends," he says. "Perhaps sorrow has brought them together" (P1, p. 153).

The three characters try to make the best not only of the part they play in the affair but also of their current situation. Thus W2 emphasises that although it is unpleasant to be at the mercy of the spotlight, things could be worse. "You might get angry," she says, addressing the light, "and blaze me clean out of my wits. . . . But I doubt it. It would not be like you somehow" (P1, p. 153). Elsewhere she speculates that the light may be "pitying me, thinking, Poor thing, she needs a rest" (P1, p. 155). Like the other characters, W2 confers human qualities on the light--qualities of pity, curiosity and understanding--for the sake of making her situation as bearable as possible.⁷⁴ Yet she recognises that in doing this she may be making "the same mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none" (P1, p. 153-54): the

light may be wholly indifferent to her, and its task in interrogating her utterly senseless.

Similarly, M believes initially that the time he spends at the mercy of the light must be finite. "[Peace] will come," he says. "Must come. There is no future in this" (P1, p. 153). The interrogation will end, he thinks, when the light succeeds in eliciting "[s]ome truth" (P1, p. 157) from him. But although his comment that his affair with W2 was "just . . . play" (P1, p. 153) has the ring of truth to it, the light continues to shine on him, and the question, "when will . . . all this [the afterlife situation] have been . . . just play [too]?" (P1, p. 153), remains unanswered. The light's dalliance with the three characters would be just (as opposed to unjust) play if it were clear that its inquisition were limited to whatever time it might take for them to atone for what they have done. However, there is no sign in the play that the light operates in accordance with any such principle of justice: it may well go on forever.

Like M, W1 wonders at first whether the light requires her to speak the truth. "Is it that . . . some day somehow I may tell the truth at last," she asks herself, "and then no more light at last, for the truth?" (P1, p. 153). Later, addressing the light, she speculates as to whether some act of self-mortification is required of her ("Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that placate you?" (P1, p. 154)); ultimately, however, she realises that doing penance "does not seem to be the point" (P1, p. 156). Like W2, she sees that "[t]here is no sense in this . . . none whatsoever" (P1, p. 154): the light operates as it does for purely arbitrary reasons, and probably cannot be stopped.

In the published text of Play Beckett calls for the entire play to be repeated in performance, and comments that "The repeat may be an exact replica of first statement or it may present an element of variation" (Pl, p. 160). If the repeat is an exact replica of the original performance, Play can be seen to mimic the non-culminating circles of Purgatory, as described in Beckett's essay on Joyce.⁷⁵ If, however, the repeat is a variation on the original, involving (as it did in the 1964 Paris and London productions Beckett supervised) a lowering of both the intensity of the light and the volume of the voices, Play becomes an analogue to the waning of life and the eventual approach of death.⁷⁶ For as Beckett told the London director, George Devine, weakening the light and voices in the repeat creates "the impression of falling off, . . . with [the] suggestion of conceivable dark and silence in the end. . . ."⁷⁷

It is significant that in an interview with Tom Driver in 1961, Beckett used the metaphor of light and dark in connection with our life-long need to make sense of the world around us, for in Play he is using the metaphor in much the same way. "If light and dark did not both present themselves to us," Beckett told Driver, "there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable. . . . But where we have both dark and light we have also the inexplicable."⁷⁸ Here Beckett is echoing Schopenhauer, who in The World as Will and Idea argues that we are all subject to a deeprooted need to answer metaphysical questions about the world we live in, a need that derives largely from our awareness of the brevity of life and the inevitability of death. "If our life were endless and painless," says Schopenhauer, "it would

perhaps occur to no one to ask why the world exists, and is just the kind of world it is; but everything would just be taken as a matter of course" (WWI, II, 360).

Play's three characters struggle to understand "just the kind of world" the one in which they find themselves actually is. All three crave silence and darkness, an end to the light; yet W1 speaks for them all when she says that she is "Dying for dark--and the darker the worse. Strange" (P1, p. 157). Complete, unending dark would mean silence and rest, but it would also bring to an end the characters' quest for meaning; for once the light is extinguished forever, the three characters will lose whatever chance there may be to make sense of their situation. In any case, the chance that they ever will fully understand what they are going through seems remote, since they are caught up in arbitrary and unjust, as opposed to "just" play. It is no easier for them to find order and meaning in their situation than it is for mankind more generally to make ultimate sense of the world at large.

7

Though the plays Beckett wrote for stage and screen during the sixties are not major works, they are nevertheless of interest as part of his development as an artist. Beckett's one and only excursion into film is further testimony to his willingness to "make it new," in Ezra Pound's phrase; Film may not be entirely successful, but it is nevertheless an example of Beckett's enthusiasm for developing new forms to give expression to his interest in the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge. Come and

Go and Breath are interesting experiments in dramatic minimalism; they are experiments to see how brief a stage play can be made and still convey to an audience something meaningful about how much we can hope to know about the world around us. Happy Days and Play each present us with a bizarre situation partly reminiscent of Dante's depictions of the afterlife; each play is concerned, as Eh Joe is, with some of the psychological factors that can limit the extent of the individual's knowledge. Beckett's practice as a dramatist in these plays is consistent with the theory of art he puts forward in his early critical essays. Also consistent with his theory are the three plays that follow--Not I, That Time and Footfalls; but these are far more major dramatic works, as we shall see in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹For dates of composition, see Richard Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 25, 28-30, 42-44, 48, 55-56, and 77-80.

²For information about the Grove Press project, see Enoch Brater, "The Thinking Eye in Beckett's Film," Modern Language Quarterly, 36 (1975), 166. In The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1985), p. 105, S.E. Gontarski reveals that Beckett began work on Film on 5 April 1963. The first draft, called both "Notes for Film" and "'Percipi' Notes," was completed four days later. A second draft, entitled "Outline Sent to Grove," was finished on 22 May 1963, and was eventually succeeded by a forty-leaf "Shooting Script," on which 20 July 1964 is noted as the shooting date.

³Bair, pp. 204-05. In the passage quoted, Bair is quoting from a letter to Thomas McGreevy in which Beckett paraphrases his comments to Pudovkin.

⁴See Brater, 167, for a fuller discussion of Film's resemblances to the cinema of the twenties. In The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p. 213, n6, Gontarski notes that Film was produced in colour by David Clark for the British Film Institute without Beckett's supervision in 1979. "The Clark version," he comments, ". . . is an interesting transformation of the script, but it clearly runs counter to Beckett's aesthetic interests."

⁵All quotations from Film are from Samuel Beckett, Film: Complete Scenario/ Illustrations/ Production Shots (London: Faber & Faber, 1972). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation Fi.

⁶Sylvie Debevec Henning, "'Film': a Dialogue Between Beckett and Berkeley," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 7 (Spring 1982), 89-99.

⁷Henning, 89.

⁸George Berkeley, "Of the Principles of Human Knowledge," in The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, ed. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1949), II, 42. All quotations from Berkeley in Henning have had their page numbers brought into conformity with this edition of Berkeley.

⁹Henning, 91-92. The quotation from Berkeley in this passage is from "Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous," in The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, II, 252.

¹⁰Henning, 93-94.

¹¹Beckett's now-famous dialogues with Duthuit first appeared as "Three Dialogues," Transition Forty-Nine, 5 ([Dec.] 1949), 97-103, and have been reprinted many times, most recently in Samuel Beckett, Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), pp. 138-45.

¹²For Schopenhauer's comments on Berkeley, see WWI, II, 29 and 163-65.

¹³See WWI, I, 5, where Schopenhauer defines the subject as "That which knows all things and is known by none . . ."; and WWI, II, 421, where he says that "the intellect [often] remains . . . completely excluded from the real decisions and secret purposes of its own will . . ."

¹⁴See WWI, I, 489-90.

¹⁵Henning, 90, argues persuasively that 45° is adopted "because an observer standing at an angle of 45 degrees or less to a mirror can no longer see his own reflection."

¹⁶See Fi, pp. 16 and 20.

¹⁷See Fi, p. 15, where we are told that throughout Film, O's vision is "blurred through a lens-gauze," while E's is not.

¹⁸In "Samuel Beckett: Play and Film," trans. Anna Bostock, Mosaic, 2 (Winter 1969), 109, Ernst Fischer draws attention to this passage in Murphy in his discussion of Film. However, he reaches different conclusions from mine.

¹⁹As we saw in Chapter Four, he "Griffith" in this passage is D.W. Griffith, whose early silent films are described by Ernest Lindgren in The Art of Film (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 72-75.

²⁰In "Film and the Religion of Art," in Beckett the Shape Changer: a Symposium, ed. Katharine Worth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 169, Martin Dodsworth comments that "[O's] falling back into the rocking-chair when, as he thinks, all eyes have been turned from him recalls Murphy's use of it . . . Murphy uses the mental freedom afforded him by his rocking to bring himself as near as he possibly can to nothing, 'a mote in the dark of absolute freedom'. He seeks, and obtains, 'the sensation of being caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion'. We may hazard that something of the same sort is what O is after."

²¹In The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p. 187, Gontarski says that Beckett told the team that produced Film that O's perceptions were "diseased."

²²Ruth Perlmutter, "Beckett's Film and Beckett and Film," Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (February 1977), 89.

²³Beryl Fletcher et al. draw attention to these shortcomings in A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber, 1978) p. 181. For other objections to Film, see Dodsworth, pp. 164-67, Gontarski, The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 109-11, and Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 169.

²⁴See Alan Schneider's "On Directing Film," in Samuel Beckett, Film: Complete Scenario/ Illustrations/ Production Shots (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 63-94.

²⁵Quoted in Clas Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting (Ab8: Ab8 Akademi, 1976), p. 183.

²⁶In "Art in Microcosm: the Manuscript Stages of Beckett's Come and Go," Modern Drama, 19 (Sept. 1976), 245-54, Breon Mitchell says that Come and Go was written in about 1965 and first published in English in 1966 in a bilingual (English/German) edition of his plays, Aus einem aufgegebenen Werk und kurze Spiele (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag). In The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), p. 25, Richard Admussen says that Breath was written in about 1966 (though no manuscript survives); it was first published in Gambit, 4, No. 16 (1969), 5-9, together with an introduction by John Calder. Both plays have been reprinted in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). All quotations are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by CG in the case of Come and Go, and by B in the case of Breath.

²⁷Beckett may have been influenced to write these two short plays by the following passage in Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea: " . . . it is not merely the highest productions of nature, living creatures, or the complicated phenomena of the unorganised world that remain inscrutable to us, but even every rock-crystal, every iron-pyrite, by reason of its crystallographical, optical, chemical, and electrical properties, is to the searching consideration and investigation an abyss of incomprehensibilities and mysteries" (WWI, II, 404). It would appear that in both Breath and Come and Go, Beckett is seeking to create in two minimalist stage plays a counterpart to the complexities of the simplest phenomena in nature.

²⁸G.C. Barnard draws attention to the relevance of this passage in Godot in Samuel Beckett: a New Approach (London: Dent, 1970), p. 100. Like Godot, which Beckett subtitled "a tragicomedy in two acts," Breath is a mixture of the comic and the serious. In James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: the Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 127, Knowlson says that "Beckett himself [has] wittily described [the play] . . . as a 'farce in five acts.'"

²⁹Hersh Zeifman, "Come and Go: a Criticule," in Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives, ed. Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1982), p. 140.

³⁰Hugh Kenner makes this point in A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 174.

³¹Breon Mitchell relates Flo, Ru and Vi to the Three Graces and Chekhov's three women characters in "Art in Microcosm: the Manuscript Stages of Beckett's Come and Go," Modern Drama, 19 (September 1976), 245-46.

³²Karen Laughlin, "'Looking for sense . . .': the Spectator's Response to Beckett's Come and Go," Modern Drama, 30 (June 1987), 141.

³³In Beckett and Broadcasting, pp. 183-84, Zilliagus notes that Eh Joe was not a commission, and lists the various drafts of the play and the dates they were written. All quotations from Eh Joe are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by EJ.

³⁴Ibid., p.183.

³⁵In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 188, Beryl Fletcher et al. draw attention to the resemblance between the "green one" and the girl "in a shabby green coat" in Krapp's Last Tape. They also note the resemblance between "That slut that comes on Saturday" (EJ, p. 203) and Fanny in Krapp's Last Tape.

³⁶Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 113.

³⁷In Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 187, Zilliagus gives this quotation from the interview in the original German. I am grateful to Peter Falkenberg of the University of Canterbury German Department for translating it for me.

³⁸S.E. Gontarski, "The Anatomy of Beckett's Eh Joe," Modern Drama 26 (December 1983), 426.

³⁹Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. 19, p. 168.

⁴⁰In Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 189, Zilliagus also makes this point.

⁴¹In "The Anatomy of Beckett's Eh Joe," 427, Gontarski rightly comments that the voice "is not only the voice of memory, even memory rearranged or juxtaposed, . . . but [may well be] memory embellished, that is imagination or creativity."

⁴²Quoted by Zilliagus in Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 194.

⁴³Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁴All quotations from Happy Days are from the Faber & Faber edition of the play (London, 1963); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by HD.

⁴⁵See HD, p. 26, where Winnie asks: "Is gravity what it was, Willie, I fancy not. . . . Don't you ever have that feeling, Willie, of being sucked up?"

⁴⁶In Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 253, Ruby Cohn comments that "Winnie's 'old style' is implicitly contrasted with Dante's dolce stil nuovo; she even utters the phrase 'sweet old style.'" In The Long Sonata of the Dead (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 290, Michael Robinson comments that the world of Happy Days is "the visual presentation of an isolated corner of Dante's Inferno. Like the Violent against God, Nature and Art she is confined to a burning desert under a rain of perpetual fire, visible first from waist to head like the Heretics in their burning tombs, and then from forehead to neck like the Traitors Dante saw in the Lake of Cocytus."

⁴⁷In Samuel Beckett (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971), p. 117, Francis Doherty comments that if there were a third act, there would be "silence, the burial of the head up to the eyes, no mouth to talk, no one to talk to, only the mind to think, to be made to think." That is also possible, though the daily return of Winnie's belongings makes it seem more probable that Act III would return Winnie to the situation in Act I.

⁴⁸S.E. Gontarski, Beckett's Happy Days: a Manuscript Study (Columbus: Ohio State U.P., 1977), p. 13. In 2 Samuel 24.14, David says of God that "his mercies are great," and in Isaiah 54.7, God says, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." Reference to God's "tender mercies" is to be found in various Psalms, including 25.6, 40.11, 51.1, 77.9, 79.8 and 103.4.

⁴⁹In contrast to Winnie, Willie is presented in the play as a sexual animal. Thus in Act I Winnie speaks of envying "the brute beast" only a moment before Willie's "hairy forearm" (HD, p. 16) appears above the mound; throughout the play Willie never rises to his feet, but crawls on all fours; and when Winnie notes that the bristles on her toothbrush are "pure . . . hog's . . . setae," Willie introduces a sexual note into the conversation by revealing that a hog is a "Castrated male swine" (HD, p. 35). In context, this phrase seems to relate to Willie, since there are various hints that he has been metaphorically emasculated by his domineering wife.

⁵⁰Robert Burns, "Holy Willie's Prayer," in English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (N.Y.: Oxford U.P., 1956), p. 143. It should also be borne in mind that "willie" is British/Irish slang for penis.

⁵¹When Winnie says that the ant is carrying an egg, Willie utters the word "Formication" (HD, p. 24) and laughs. Clearly he is amused at the resemblance between this word (which means the

sensation of having ants crawl over the skin) and "fornication." Why Winnie laughs is less clear: she may think it funny that God sends ants to hell and allows them to breed, so that He can punish successive generations of them for the original sin of having been born (see note 23); or she may be amused at the appropriateness of ants appearing in her world, given that human activity is to God like that of ants on an anthill.

⁵²Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (1621; rpt. New York: Tudor, 1948), pp. 237-38.

⁵³Cf. A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 138, where Beryl Fletcher et al. comment that "The play indicts what Beckett calls, in Proust, people's 'smug will to live', which Winnie's optimism certainly epitomizes."

⁵⁴S.E. Gontarski, Beckett's Happy Days: a Manuscript Study, p. 63. See pp. 59-73 for the sources. Like Gontarski, Anthony Brennan, in "Winnie's Golden Treasury: the Use of Quotation in Happy Days," Arizona Quarterly, 35 (1979), 205-27, offers an interpretation of the significance of the allusions in Happy Days that differs in various ways from the one I offer here.

⁵⁵The phrase "Hail, holy light" is from Paradise Lost III.1. Gontarski, p. 69, comments that, "as Milton reminds us, 'God is light,' and light is eternal . . . But the celebration of the eternity of light is a sharp contrast to the reality of Winnie's condition. What Winnie needs, in point of fact, is not a rhapsody on the divinity of light, but shade, a relief from oppressive reality." Nevertheless, the line is a comfort to Winnie, who despite her cynicism about some of God's poorer "little jokes" (HD, p. 24), is nevertheless convinced that someone--presumably God--is "[c]aring for her still" (HD, p. 37).

⁵⁶Elsewhere in Act I Winnie echoes Cymbeline when she says to Willie "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (HD, p. 21) as he crawls into his hole behind her. This is the first line of the song Guiderius and Arviragus sing over the body of a youth named Fidele, who is really their sister Imogen in disguise (Cymbeline IV.ii.258). Imogen is not, as Guiderius and Arviragus assume, beyond the dangers posed by the heat of the sun, for she is drugged, not dead. Similarly, Willie is susceptible to sunburn, while Winnie is not: Winnie considers it a great mercy that she does not suffer as Willie does.

⁵⁷Paradise Lost X.741-42.

⁵⁸As we saw in Chapters One and Seven, two of Beckett's favourite lines of verse are that "The greatest crime of man/ Is that he ever was born." The lines, from Calderon, are quoted by Schopenhauer in WWI, I, 328 and 458, and WWI, III, 420.

⁵⁹Hamlet III.i.158-69.

⁶⁰Winnie echoes Edward FitzGerald's translation of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam to the same effect in Act I, when she says to Willie, "just to know you are there within hearing and conceivably on the semi-alert is . . . er . . . paradise enow" (HD, p. 25). The lines she is alluding to are the famous ones that speak of "A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,/ A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou/ Beside me singing in the Wilderness--/ Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!" (Rubaiyat XII.45-48). In Happy Days Winnie's fragmented memories of the classics take the place of any book of verses; there is no wine or food, which reminds us that this is an afterlife situation; the wilderness is so extreme that Winnie's parasol catches on fire; and Willie is a less-than-ideal object of love.

⁶¹Romeo and Juliet V.iii.94-96.

⁶²Twelfth Night II.iv.113-15.

⁶³Thomas Gray, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1747), in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Louis Bredvold et al. (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 591.

⁶⁴Ibid. Gray's epigraph appears in the original Greek; the above is the translation furnished by the editors of Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 592.

⁶⁶The phrase "cannot be cured" is surely an allusion to "The Lily of Killarney," a song which, as we saw in Chapter Nine, is echoed in Words and Music. Beckett did not mention this song in the list of sources he supplied to Schneider.

⁶⁷Quoted in Beckett's Happy Days: a Manuscript Study, p. 71.

⁶⁸Winnie says she is disgusted by the obscene postcard Willie produces in Act I, but examines it carefully to see what the people pictured in it are doing (see HD, pp. 16-17). Her story of the little girl she calls Mildred is interesting for its autobiographical implications: the fact that Mildred resembles both Willie and herself in various respects suggests that the story of the mouse running up her leg is Winnie's way of describing her own first experience of sex--her fright at its animality, and at the invasion of her person. (In Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1962), p. 256, Ruby Cohn notes that Winnie refers to Mildred as "Milly (that rhymes with Willie), and her Dolly (an off-rhyme with Willie) has a 'white straw hat' like Willie's and 'China Blue eyes' like his. She also wears a 'pearly necklet,' as Winnie did in Act I." Doherty, p. 118, suggests that the story of Mildred is "a substitute or metaphor for some terror which she cannot articulate or put into words").

⁶⁹In Beckett's Happy Days: a Manuscript Study, p. 37, Gontarski points out that in an early typescript of the play, Winnie says "'Is it me you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else? . . . Is

it a kiss you're after, Willie . . . ?" He comments that "Although [the word] 'kiss' make[s] the scene more concrete, the incident is dominated by the vague phrase, . . . 'or something else'. . . . Is Willie struggling toward Winnie, the revolver, or both? And to what end: to kiss or kill her?--or to end his own misery? . . . She may not even be aware that Willie is possibly struggling toward the gun."

⁷⁰See Richard Admussen, "The Manuscripts of Beckett's Play," Modern Drama, 16 (June 1973), 25, for further information about Beckett's translation of Play into French. That Play is set in the afterlife is only implicit in the published version. Admussen, p. 24, notes that in an early manuscript it is considerably clearer that all the characters are dead: "each wonders if the others feel sorry for him, and someone speaks of reasoning 'in the old earthly way.'"

⁷¹In John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: a Study of His Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p. 109, John Spurling likens the physical situation of the three characters to that of Basil/Mahood. He says nothing, however, of Keats's "Isabella." In "Playing Play," Theatre Journal, 35 (Dec. 1985), 405, n12, W.B. Worthen identifies another possible source for Play, the introductory epistle to Sir Thomas Browne's Urne-Buriall: "But these are sad and sepulchral Pitchers, which have no joyful voices; silently expressing old mortality, the ruines of forgotten times, and can only speak with life, how long in this corruptible frame, some parts may be uncorrupted; yet able to out-last bones long unborn." (Sir Thomas Browne, Selected Writings, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 115).

⁷²All quotations from Play are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by P1. Cp. the summary provided by Ruby Cohn in Back to Beckett, p. 195, which differs in some respects from mine.

⁷³As we shall see, Beckett made some changes to the text in production which indicate that the three characters' ordeal may eventually come to an end.

⁷⁴James Knowlson makes a similar point about the characters' attitude to the light in Frescoes of the Skull, p. 117.

⁷⁵In "Samuel Beckett's Interest in Form: Structural Patterning in Play," Modern Drama, 19 (Sept. 1976), 237, Rosemary Pountney comments, similarly, that "At the end of ["Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce"] Beckett . . . [compares] Dante's conical view of purgatory with Joyce's spherical one. Since Play, the most perfectly patterned of Beckett's plays, also takes the purgatorial theme and makes use of both motifs, this comparison is of especial interest."

⁷⁶In Frescoes of the Skull, p. 118, Knowlson notes that in 1964 Beckett altered the da capo structure in both the Paris production of Comédie and the London production of Play to provide for a weakening of both the light and the voices.

⁷⁷Letter to George Devine, 9 March 1964, quoted by Knowlson in Frescoes of the Skull, p. 118.

⁷⁸Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer 1961), 23.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SHAPE OF IDEAS

1

"I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them," Beckett told Harold Hobson in 1956. "There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned." That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters."¹ As in Waiting for Godot, which is based on this passage in Augustine, so also in All That Fall and three plays of the seventies--That Time, Not I and Footfalls²--Beckett's overall purpose in employing a "shape of ideas" approach to his writing is to draw into question the existence and behaviour of God. Thus, in his first radio play, a play arising from Psalm 145.14--"The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down"--Beckett makes use of repeated references to falling to anticipate the fall from a railway carriage of a small child, and to ask, implicitly, why God did not intervene to prevent it. In That Time, Not I and Footfalls, Beckett again adopts a "shape of ideas" approach to drama, the theme and/or structure of each play arising, as in the case of All That Fall, from his choice of title. In each he draws attention to the limits of human knowledge by offering cynical alternatives to the belief that God exists and is benevolently disposed to man.

Significantly, the title of That Time is ambiguous. As James Knowlson has observed, it should be read "both as 'that time' and as 'that Time.'" Beckett had great difficulty in rendering this play into French for the recurring phrase 'that time' clearly means at once 'cette fois' (or 'la fois où') and 'ce Temps.' His title Cette fois was, as he put it [in conversation with Knowlson], a 'recognition of the impossibility of capturing both senses.'"³

Knowlson suggests that the "ce Temps" ("that Time") sense of the title derives from a passage at the end of Le Temps retrouvé, a passage Beckett quotes at the start of his 1931 essay on Proust. "'But were I granted time to accomplish my work,'" Proust's narrator writes, "'I would not fail to stamp it with the seal of that Time, now so forcibly present to my mind, and in it I would describe men . . . as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space . . .'" (P, p. 12).⁴ Like the narrator's projected characters, those in Proust's novel are presented temporally rather than spatially, in recognition of the fact that people change with the passing of time. An individual is not the same person today as he was yesterday, and has not the same outlook. "The aspirations of yesterday," comments Beckett, "were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. . . . For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner" (P, pp. 13-14). Each of Proust's

characters is thus a succession of personalities, extended in time, rather than a single, essentially spatial personality.

Similarly, in That Time, Listener attends to memories of the persons he once was: A in middle age, B in youth and C in old age.⁵ That he is distanced from all three in time is evident from the fact that he refers to each as "you" ("tu" in Beckett's French translation).⁶ In the opening stage directions, he is said to have an "Old white face" and "long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread": the sense we have is that he is on his deathbed, recalling key episodes from his past.⁷

Beckett's essay on Proust sheds light on the "ce Temps" aspect of the title of That Time, but it does not explain why Beckett chose to call the translation Cette fois; why he is concerned in the play with only three of Listener's selves, when Proust's characters exhibit a larger number; or why, more generally, the play abounds in structural and thematic groupings of three. In his study of the play's manuscripts, S.E. Gontarski reveals that Beckett "had from the first both a clear, if almost rigid, format for That Time, a triadic structure, like that of How It Is, and a thematic link for the three incidents: '3 fold text [the earliest holograph reads] in single voice coming from text (A). Light (B). Above (C). Recurrence of element time in all 3, e.g., "the time they . . . ," "that time she," "one time--we. . . . "'⁸ The final version of the play is in three parts, the first two ending with a brief silence where Listener appears to gather his thoughts, and the last with the final curtain. Each part consists of four groupings of three memories, which are presented to us by a single voice through three different loudspeakers:

1. ACB ACB ACB CAB (First silence)
2. CBA CBA CBA BCA (Second silence)
3. BAC BAC BAC BAC (End of play)⁹

Where the dramatic shape of Godot and All That Fall was suggested to Beckett by St. Augustine and the Bible, respectively, the shape of That Time derives partly from Proust and quite possibly from another source: Wordsworth's famous poem, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey."¹⁰ Like That Time, "Tintern Abbey" embodies a number of structural triads and deals with three stages in an individual's life. Moreover, of the second stage in his own life, Wordsworth says in the poem:

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. (TA, ll. 84-89)¹¹

"That time" is past for Listener as well: each of the three stages of his life is now behind him and can only be recovered through memory. But whereas for Wordsworth there are "other gifts" to compensate for what has been lost, for Listener there is nothing. Beckett adapts the shape of "Tintern Abbey" to That Time, but not its optimistic view of God's presence in nature and benevolence to man, his play being not simply a dramatised version of Wordsworth's poem, but a post-Romantic variation on it instead.

In the first of "Tintern Abbey's" four parts, Wordsworth describes the woodland scene he has revisited after the passage of five years. The scene has been present in his mind throughout that time, he says in the second part, and it has affected him in three ways. The memory of its beauty has, first of all, brought cheer to

the life he has led "in lonely rooms, and mid the din/ Of towns and cities . . . " (TA, ll. 26-27); secondly, it has given rise to feelings of "unremembered pleasure" (TA, l. 32) which might not otherwise have been evoked; thirdly, it has helped to lighten a heavy metaphysical burden: " . . . the burthen of the mystery,/ . . . Of all this unintelligible world" (TA, ll. 39-41).

In the third part of the poem, Wordsworth describes his response to nature at each of three stages in his life: childhood, youth and maturity. Though he dismisses his childhood response as naively sensual, it serves as an important contrast in the poem to his youthful view of nature, which he says was characterised by deep feeling:

The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, or any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye. (TA, ll. 77-84)

Significantly, the emotion described here has reference to no one but the poet himself. The mature Wordsworth is more aware of his fellow man, and of the existence of human suffering:

For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue. (TA, ll. 89-94)

His awareness of the suffering of others marks the first of three differences between his youthful view of nature and his mature view. The second difference is that in maturity Wordsworth has developed a sense of God's immanence in nature:

. . . a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. (TA, ll. 96-103)

The third way in which Wordsworth's mature view of nature differs from his youthful response is that it is informed by a new moral sense. It follows from the poet's awareness of human suffering and of the presence of God in all things that he now finds in nature "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being" (TA, ll. 110-12).

In the last part of the poem, Wordsworth moves from the personal to the more general. He says that he sees in his sister Dorothy someone who has reached the stage of viewing nature as he himself did in his youth; he feels confident that she, too, will progress to the third, mature level. The three levels, Wordsworth emphasises, can be experienced by anyone with the right attitude to the natural world, for

. . . Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our chearful faith that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. (TA, ll. 123-35)

The last few lines are of particular interest, because whereas Wordsworth maintains a "chearful faith" not only that God is present in nature, but that His presence means that the natural world is

"full of blessings," Beckett takes a much darker view of man's relationship to nature in That Time.

The play opens with the first of Listener's A memories--his memories of travelling from England to Ireland as a middle-aged man in order to visit the folly where he hid as a child. As in "Tintern Abbey," what is involved here is a return not only to a place visited earlier, but to a scene featuring a ruin. Significantly, in neither the poem nor the play is the ruin described, for what is important in both cases is not the natural setting so much as the human response to it. Wordsworth is drawn back to the countryside by its beauty and by the fact that his memory of it has had in the interim three beneficial effects. A's reasons for wanting to go back to the folly are, by contrast, unclear. However, from the way he describes his return, there can be no doubt about his single-mindedness: "straight off the ferry and up with the nightbag to the high street neither right nor left not a curse for the old scenes the old names straight up the rise . . . that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child . . . " (TT, pp. 228-29).

Wordsworth emphasises in "Tintern Abbey" that his boyhood enjoyment of nature was straightforward and naive: in two lines he dismisses the "coarser pleasures of my boyish days,/ And their glad animal movements . . . " (TA, ll. 74-75) as trivial in comparison with his later response to nature. Listener's childhood experience is more complex, for just as in the period between his two trips to Tintern Abbey, Wordsworth found that revisiting the scene in memory dispelled feelings of loneliness in towns and cities, so as a child Listener goes to the folly to escape his loneliness in the company of

adults. Once there, he spends his time poring over picture-books and "making up talk breaking up two or more talking to himself being together that way where none ever came" (TT, p. 233). Nature clearly has little to do with the child's solution to loneliness, apart from supplying him with a refuge from the adults who come "out on the roads looking for you" (TT, p. 230), sometimes late at night. As a child Listener finds the pictures in his books more appealing than natural beauty, and derives consolation for his loneliness from imaginary conversations rather than from the memory of scenes he has viewed.

That he finds it difficult in middle age to form and maintain relationships with other people is implied near the start of the play when he tries to recall where he slept the night of his visit: " . . . where did you sleep no friend all the homes gone was it that kip on the front where you no she was with you then still with you then just the one night in any case off the ferry one morning and back on her the next . . . " (TT, p. 229). A finds on his return to Ireland that he has no friends he can stay with, all the houses having been torn down in the areas where they used to live; he spends only one night away from England because he is anxious to return to the unnamed woman who has been living with him there. The woman may be his mother, though she appears to have died earlier ("was your mother ah for God's sake . . . gone long ago" (TT, p. 229)). Alternatively, she may be his mistress, or even his sister, for a woman named "Dolly"--named, perhaps, after Wordsworth's sister Dorothy--is mentioned in the A sections of early drafts of the play.¹² Whoever the woman is, she eventually dies or leaves him, and Listener spends the rest of his life as a solitary.

Having arrived in Ireland, A discovers that the trams that used to run to the folly are gone ("not a wire to be seen only the old rails all rust" (TT, p. 229)), and that the train no longer runs there either ("Doric terminus of the Great Southern and Eastern all closed down and the colonnade crumbling away" (TT, p. 231)). Clearly he has been away for a long time, and although he desperately wants to revisit the folly, it does not occur to him to walk there, as Wordsworth and Dorothy might have done.¹³ Instead he sits down on someone's doorstep and begins talking to himself: " . . . there on the step in the pale sun you heard yourself at it again not a curse for the passers pausing to gape at the scandal huddled there in the sun . . . drooling away out loud eyes closed . . . forgetting it all" (TT, p. 233-34). The "passers pausing to gape" put us in mind of the parable of the Good Samaritan, though in the play, no one stops to help.¹⁴ Listener is reminiscent, too, of Wordsworth's old Cumberland beggar, particularly when he pictures himself "tottering and muttering all over the parish" (TT, p. 231-32). In "The Old Cumberland Beggar," Wordsworth shows how the beggar's misfortunes prompt members of the community to acts of charity that ensure his continued well-being. Wordsworth says in the poem that a "benignant law of heaven"¹⁵ is responsible for preserving the beggar, the implication being that the people who look after him are, in effect, agents of Providence. In That Time, by contrast, it is implied that God either does not exist, or if He does, is indifferent to the sufferings of His creatures.

A sits in the doorstep talking to himself rather than get up and ask someone whether, apart from tram or train, there is another way to get to the folly, for he has resolved at some earlier time not to

utter "another word to the living as long as [he] lived" (TT, p. 231). His trip to Ireland has been a failure: not only has he been unable to visit the ruin where he hid as a child, he has been denied the possibility of gaining a firmer grip on his identity by revisiting an important childhood scene. His sense of who he is and was slips away from him, and he finds himself "making it all up on the doorstep as you went along making yourself all up again for the millionth time" (TT, p. 234). For Wordsworth, just remembering the scene surrounding Tintern Abbey is enough to lighten "the burthen of the mystery,/ . . . Of all this unintelligible world" (TA, ll. 39-41). For A, by contrast, nothing short of a visit is necessary to help him fathom the mystery of his unintelligible identity. Frustrated by his inability to return to the ruin, he falls back on the expedient of manufacturing a fictional version of himself "for the millionth time."

The other benefits that accrue to Wordsworth from remembering the scene are also denied A. A's memory of Foley's folly has done nothing to dispel his loneliness or to help him form lasting relationships with other people. Nor has it evoked feelings of "unremembered pleasure" associated, as in "Tintern Abbey," with "little, nameless, unremembered acts/ Of kindness and of love" ll. 32; 35-36). Such feelings arise not in A--Listener in middle age--but in B, Listener as a youth.

In the B memories, Listener pictures himself either standing, sitting or lying next to an unnamed girl, exchanging vows of love. Before them as they sit is a beautiful autumnal scene, consisting of a "little wood and as far as eye could see the wheat turning yellow" (TT, p. 228). The scene is the "one thing could ever bring tears

till they dried up altogether that thought when it came up among the others floated up that scene" (TT, p. 229), and Listener is careful to stress that it often "floated up" involuntarily, displacing "whatever thoughts you might be having whatever scenes" (TT, p. 230). Because the scene presents itself to his memory spontaneously, rather than by way of a conscious act of recollection, it may be said to be a source of "unremembered pleasure"--though whether the pleasure arises from the scene's beauty or from the vows of love is not immediately clear. Late in the play, Listener confesses that both the girl and the vows are fictions, not memories, but says that they come so clearly to mind that he finds it "hard to believe you even you made [them] up . . . " (TT, p. 234). The delight that accrues from the scene is thus "unremembered" in the sense of being invented, as well as in the sense of being subsequently involuntary. When B admits that he viewed the beautiful autumnal scene and the two others by himself, it becomes clear that at least some of the pleasure he associates with youth arises from his enjoyment of nature.

His invented relationship with the unnamed girl is an odd one. Whether standing, sitting or lying, the two keep a deliberate distance between them, and are careful not to touch. While with her, B has

no sight of the face or any other part never turned to her nor she to you always parallel like on an axle-tree never turned to each other just blurs on the fringes of the field no touching or anything of that nature always space between if only an inch no pawing in the manner of flesh and blood no better than shades . . . (TT, p. 231).

B and the girl are mere blurs on the fringes of each other's perceptual field, and by virtue of their commitment to a non-physical relationship, are no better than "shades"--no better than the souls

of the departed in Dante's Divine Comedy. They might be brother and sister, but for their vows of love; yet it is clear from their inattention to each other that B is unable to claim, as Wordsworth does of Dorothy, that he can see an earlier version of himself in the girl.

"[A]lways parallel like on an axle-tree," they are joined by the bond of mortality--a bond implicit in the axle-tree image, which appears to derive from Eliot's "Burnt Norton":

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
Clot the bedded axle-tree.
The trilling wire in the blood
Sings below inveterate scars
Appeasing long forgotten wars.¹⁶

The "trilling wire" of life sings in the blood of B and the unnamed girl as they stand together on a towpath in another of the memories; a dead rat floating past them from upstream is a reminder, however, that eventually they will die. We are not surprised when Listener admits that the story of his love for the girl is one he made up "to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud" (TT, p. 230). Listener is much preoccupied with the inevitability of death, and finds his narrative a convenient means of keeping morbid thoughts at bay.

Two of the B memories are of Listener alone in the dark, "harking to the owl" (TT, p. 230), then hooting to it, but failing to get it to hoot in return. These memories are again intimations of mortality, for they are clearly based on the famous passage in Book Five of The Prelude where Wordsworth tells of a boy who took pleasure in hooting at the owls at night, and who died before his time.¹⁷

Beckett departs from Wordsworth in the second of the two memories when Listener recalls the time an owl flew "to hoot at someone else

or back with a shrew to its hollow tree" (TT, p. 234). Nevertheless, the shrew is another reminder of death, and B follows his mention of it with the comment that he gave up hooting at the owls, "gave up for good and let it in . . . a great shroud billowing in all over you . . . " (TT, p. 234). Here he accepts his own mortality with an attitude of helpless resignation.

The B memories provide Listener with "unremembered pleasure" in the form of both invented and involuntary pleasure, and because they are based partly on his enjoyment of natural beauty, they may be said to be consistent with Wordsworth's delight in nature in "Tintern Abbey." On the other hand, the autumnal scene B lingers on, with "the wheat turning yellow" (TT, pp. 228, 230), does nothing to lighten "the burthen of the mystery/ . . . Of all this unintelligible world" (TA, ll. 39-41), for it is a reminder of mortality (the wheat will soon be harvested, with winter to follow) rather than a source of comfort. Death for Listener is associated with "the void." He does not share Wordsworth's "cheerful faith that all which we behold/ Is full of blessings" (TA, ll. 134-5), blessings sufficient to allay his feelings of loneliness: these persist in spite of the beauty of the scenes he describes, and impel him, as in the A memories, to invent imaginary conversations in the absence of remembered real ones.

Listener's youthful view of nature resembles Wordsworth's in that it is emotional and essentially self-absorbed. But whereas in maturity Wordsworth exchanges self-absorption for a new awareness of the "still, sad music of humanity" (TA, l. 92), Listener remains preoccupied with himself both in middle age, when he tries to return to the folly, and in old age, as he approaches death. In maturity,

Wordsworth develops a sense of God's omnipresence in nature, and comes to regard nature as "The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being" (TA, ll. 111-12). By contrast, Listener makes no mention of God as he grows older, and in old age--as C-- finds that nature is best avoided.

The C memories are all of city scenes in winter, and are almost all related to C's need to find shelter from the rain and cold. Evidently he has become a homeless old tramp--an even clearer counterpart to Wordsworth's old Cumberland beggar in old age than earlier. He has found that the Portrait Gallery, the Post Office and the Library are all suitable places to shelter, since admission to them is free, but he enters them with some trepidation, fearing that he may be asked to leave. Once indoors, he sits with his own "arms round [him] whose else hugging [himself] for a bit of warmth" (TT, p. 229); for years he has been living entirely on his own. There are various hints that he is soon to die, one of the clearest being his experience of examining a portrait one day of "some famous man or woman or even child . . . behind the glass where gradually as you peered trying to make it out gradually of all things a face appeared had you swivel on the slab to see who it was there at your elbow" (TT, p. 229). The face may be his own, which, reflected in the glass, has suddenly joined the faces of those long dead; or it may be the face of death itself, the same that threatens Krapp in Krapp's Last Tape.¹⁸

C says that he was never the same after this experience, adding, however, "but the same as what for God's sake did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now (Eyes close.) . . . always having turning-points and never but the one the first and last that time

curled up worm in slime when they lugged you out and wiped you off . . . " (TT, p. 230). James Knowlson has suggested that the image of the worm in slime is a reference to birth,¹⁹ in which case it would seem that Listener has spent a lifetime grappling with the problem of defining his own identity. Another possibility, though, is that Beckett is raising the more general question of human identity by echoing Job 25.4-6: "How . . . can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?" If Job is a source for the worm image, Beckett is probably implying that if there is a God, He takes such a dim view of man as to deny him satisfactory solutions to the problems of identity and death. Such a God would be the antithesis of the God of "Tintern Abbey," who is all too willing to furnish man with a sense of His caring presence.

Where Wordsworth finds that in maturity, he is led to a sense of God's existence and immanence in nature, and from there to the conviction that nature may be regarded as a "nurse," "guide" and "guardian of [his] heart" (TA, ll. 110-11), Listener's experience is that every man must find his own way in life, independently of God and nature. In old age he approaches the problems of identity and death with three possible solutions of his own devising. The first of these is to behave as though he were a complete stranger to himself, "trying how that would work for a change not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in whose moan had you the way you were . . . " (TT, p. 231). In this connection, he recalls once again the

time he was "alone with the portraits of the dead . . . not believing it could be you till they put you out in the rain at closing-time" (TT, p. 231). Pretending to be completely detached from himself keeps the questions of identity and death temporarily at bay, but when he finally accepts that the intimation of mortality experienced at the Portrait Gallery is of his own mortality, it becomes clear to Listener that his first solution will not do.

His second solution is to behave as though he has never existed, trying "how it would work that way for a change never having been how never having been would work . . . tottering and muttering all over the parish till the words dried up and the head dried up and the legs dried up whosoever they were or it gave up whoever it was" (TT, pp. 231-32). This solution is no more satisfactory than the first, for Listener finds it impossible to deny the fact of his own existence when, whether or not he walks and speaks, he is all too obviously alive. Thus his third solution is to accept the fact that he exists and to assume that, despite his anxiety over the questions of death and identity, he is better off than other people. He enters the Post Office one winter's day, full of self-congratulation that "bad and all as you were you were not as they till it dawned that for all the loathing you were getting you might as well not have been there at all the eyes passing over you and through you like so much thin air . . . " (TT, p. 234). What brings him up short is the realisation that other people are wholly indifferent to his presence and continuing existence.

Here his situation differs radically from Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey," for whereas Listener must live with a haunting

awareness of his own solitude, Wordsworth has a source of comfort in the company of his sister Dorothy.

For thou art with me, here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. (TA, ll. 116-20)

The phrase "For thou art with me" is of course an echo of the twenty-third Psalm, and suggests that Dorothy is, in effect, an agent of Providence. For Dorothy supplies the poet not only with the reassurance that his experience of nature is shared by someone else, but with the further implicit assurance that God exists and provides the companionship of fellow man as a balm to the indifference or unpleasantness of strangers, and to our fear of the "valley of the shadow of death."

In contrast to Wordsworth, Listener must face death alone: there is nothing in "Tintern Abbey" as chilling as his final intimation of mortality, which occurs one day when he enters the Public Library to shelter from the winter rain. He sits down and drifts off to sleep; when he opens his eyes, he sees "from floor to ceiling nothing only dust and not a sound only what was it it said come and gone . . . come and gone . . . come and gone in no time gone in no time" (TT, p. 235). As various critics have observed, this passage is an echo of Genesis 3.19--" . . . dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"--and conveys not only that Listener's life is nearly ended, but that life in general comes and goes "in no time" relative to eternity.

Listener ends the play with an enigmatic smile. "Is it," asks James Knowlson, " . . . a smile of satisfaction at the restoration of

. . . old times? A smile of relief and contentment that at last all the torment is nearly over? A wry reflection on the insignificance of the individual human existence in the context of infinity? Or a smile indicating that even capitulation to the void can still be endured with serene acceptance?"²⁰ Surely the smile is all these things and more. In the light, however, of Beckett's "shape of ideas" approach to dramatic structure--his use of "Tintern Abbey" as a point of departure for the structuring of That Time--it is certain that the smile does not arise from a Wordsworthian sense that God is good and can be relied upon to confer meaning and value on life. Beckett's post-Romantic variation on "Tintern Abbey" promotes a much darker view altogether.

3

Beckett has said that his next play, Footfalls, arose from an image that came to mind of a figure pacing up and down, and it may be, as Deirdre Bair has suggested, that the figure was biographical in origin.²¹ Bair points out that, like the play's main character May, Beckett's mother May Beckett was in the habit of pacing the house at night when she had difficulty sleeping; she had some of the carpets removed because, again like the character, it was important to her to hear the sound of her own footsteps. Footfalls, says Beckett's biographer, "seems to be primarily one version of May Beckett's insomnia."²²

It would be a mistake, however, to identify May too closely with May Beckett. Beckett's mother married at thirty; Footfalls' May, in

her forties, is a single woman who has remained at home to look after her invalid mother. Moreover, as Enoch Brater has observed, May seems to be based not only on May Beckett but also on Dickens' Miss Havisham and Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth.²³ Like Miss Havisham, who has not been out of the house since the day her fiancé jilted her, Footfalls' May has not been out of the house "since girlhood" (FF, p. 241); like Lady Macbeth, she paces the floor at night, troubled by past events.

The play's title may also be partly literary and partly biographical in origin. Though it may derive from Beckett's memories of his mother's footfalls, another possibility is that it is taken from some famous lines in "Burnt Norton," the first of Eliot's Four Quartets:

What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.

 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. (BN, ll. 6-14)²⁴

Like Four Quartets, Footfalls is divided into four parts, though in accordance with Beckett's "shape of ideas" approach to drama, neither the parts nor the whole endorses Eliot's Christian outlook. Beckett's use of "Tintern Abbey" as a source for That Time invites point-by-point comparison between the play and the poem. By contrast, the four-part structure of Footfalls is merely a nod in the direction of Eliot: Beckett's interest in this play is in developing the dramatic potential of the lines quoted above, rather than in writing a variation on "Burnt Norton" or on Four Quartets as a whole. His ultimate purpose is once again to comment on the limits of human

knowledge by raising questions about the existence and benevolence of God.

The first part of the play introduces May, who is seen pacing back and forth across the stage--nine steps in each direction²⁵--while holding a conversation with her mother. Her mother never appears in her own person; throughout, she is a disembodied voice from upstage, the voice of an old woman nearing death. From their conversation it emerges that May has arisen from bed to brood on the past. Her footfalls take her down passages of memory and imagination; as she walks, she reflects on "how it was" (FF, p. 241) and, by extension, on "[w]hat might have been." The fact that May has not ventured outside for many years means that she has denied herself the pleasure not only of any actual rose-garden, but of various figurative rose-gardens as well. Eliot's comment to an interviewer that "Burnt Norton" was based partly on a passage at the beginning of Alice in Wonderland, where Alice is unable to get through a door into a flower garden,²⁶ suggests that May is preoccupied with what her childhood might have been like in different circumstances. Critics of Eliot agree, however, that the rose-garden in "Burnt Norton" is open to a number of symbolic interpretations, and since the rose is a traditional symbol of romantic love, May is perhaps also dwelling on lost opportunities for romance.

The first part of the play draws us into a "world of speculation" in the sense that it presents May speculating on what might have been; and in the sense, too, that it invites us to speculate on what is troubling her. Yet it is an essentially naturalistic world, a world of solid objects and familiar physical needs:

M[ay]: Would you like me to inject you again?
 V[oice]: Yes, but it is too soon. . . .
 M: Straighten your pillows? [Pause.] Change your drawsheet?
 [Pause.] Pass you the bedpan? [Pause.] The warming-
 pan? [Pause.] Dress your sores? [Pause.] Sponge you
 down? [Pause.] Moisten your poor lips? [Pause.] Pray
 with you? [Pause.] For you? [Pause.] Again. [Pause.]
 V: Yes, but it is too soon (FF, p. 240).

Though she never appears on stage, May's mother is no less a flesh-and-blood character in the first part of the play than May herself: she is defined as such by the fact that she is an invalid who requires attention at fixed times.

As the first part of the play ends, the light dims; when the second part begins, the lighting is a "little less" bright than before (FF, p. 240). This change of lighting is more important than it might at first seem, for it is Beckett's way of hinting that the second part of Footfalls presents us with a slightly different world from that of the first. As before, it is a "world of speculation"; but now we are being asked to consider the possibility that May's mother has died and come back as a ghost to observe her daughter's continued pacing. "I walk here now," says the mother. "Rather I come and stand. [Pause.] At nightfall. [Pause.] [May] fancies she is alone" (FF, p. 241).²⁷

May is silent throughout the second part of the play,²⁸ but opens the third, which is cast in an even dimmer light, as follows:

Sequel. A little later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to--[Pause.] A little later, when as though she had never been, it never been, she began to walk. [Pause.] At nightfall. [Pause.] Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north door, always locked at that hour, and walk, up and down, up and down, his poor arm. [Pause.] . . . No sound. [Pause.] None at least to be heard. [Pause.] . . . A tangle of tatters. [Pause.] Watch it pass--[Pause.]--watch her pass before the candleabrum . . . like moon through passing rack (FF, p. 242).

The "tangle of tatters" that makes its way through the locked door of the church and walks up and down the north transept--the part corresponding to one of Christ's arms on the Cross--is clearly a ghost, though whether it is May's ghost or her mother's is open to speculation. May's use of the word "Sequel" at the start of the passage tells us only that the ghost begins to appear after her mother's death; Beckett has said, however, that the word is a pun on "seek well."²⁹ If it is her mother's ghost she is describing, it would seem that May pictures her as a restless spirit seeking to discover something that was hidden from her during her lifetime. Earlier in the play, her mother is anxious about May's obsessive nocturnal pacing and her longstanding refusal to go outdoors. The fact that the ghost appears in church suggests that it is the departed mother's, seeking a religious explanation for May's psychological malaise--an explanation, perhaps, as to how a benevolent God could have allowed May to suffer.

On the other hand, the ghost May describes may well be her own. Like May, it resembles Lady Macbeth in that it is given to pacing at night; it also resembles some of Pip's Gothic visions of Miss Havisham in Great Expectations.³⁰ If the ghost is May's, it could (as before) be seeking answers to questions about God's benevolence--about His part in her psychological problems, for example, and in the loss of her mother. Alternatively, the ghost may represent a wish fulfilment on May's part, since, unlike May, who has not left the house for years, it is clearly free to come and go as it pleases.

During rehearsals of the German premiere of Footfalls, Beckett revealed that May is to be understood in relation to a case history Jung described in a lecture he (Beckett) attended in 1935.³¹ Jung

spoke then of "a little girl of ten who had some most amazing mythological dreams. Her father consulted me about these dreams. I could not tell him what I thought because they contained an uncanny prognosis. The little girl died a year later of an infectious disease. She had never been born entirely."³² Earlier in the lecture, Jung made the point that young children have an awareness of mythological elements in their minds that suggests to them the idea of a former existence. This must be cast off as they grow older, for if it is not, they will experience a yearning to return to their former state--that is, a yearning to die. In Jung's view, the ghosts that appear in dreams or fantasies are mythological images.³³ Thus, if the ghost May fantasises about is her own, and if it indeed represents a wish fulfilment, it would appear that what May desires is her own death.

It would also seem that she is trying to compensate for "never [having] been born entirely" by giving birth to an alternative version of herself in the story she tells near the end of the play. This concerns a young woman named Amy (an anagram of "May") and her mother, Mrs. Winter, whose name is suggestive of approaching death. May records a conversation in which Amy insists that she was not present earlier at Vespers, and her mother insists that she was. "'Mrs. W: But I heard you respond [Pause.] I heard you say Amen. [Pause.] How could you have responded if you were not there? . . . The love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen. [Pause.] I heard you distinctly'" (FF, p. 243). Since May has told us earlier that the ghost appears "at certain seasons of the year, during Vespers" (FF,

p. 242), the implication is that it is the ghost's voice Mrs. Winter hears.

Significantly, May's story not only gives birth to a character like herself, but, through its inclusion of the words of the Vespers blessing, raises once again the question of the love of God. Eliot speaks of "Footfalls echo[ing] in the memory/ Down the passage that we did not take"; May explores a passage that she did not take in her story of Amy, whose absence from Church suggests that she is doubtful about God's existence. May's offer to pray with her mother in the first part of the play suggests that she (May) is a Christian --a Christian who has spent her life venturing down passages within herself in search of a religious experience she has never had. For if the rose-garden is, as Derek Traversi has argued, a symbol of the vision of the Divine Reality deriving from Eliot's interest in Dante,³⁴ it would appear that May has been trying to achieve the mystic's inner experience of God. In contrast, however, to Eliot's rose-garden and Dante's Paradise, which are both flooded with light, the world of Footfalls is a twilight world, and its fourth part, the final tableau, is even more dimly lit than the three parts preceding it. Since May's onstage pacing corresponds to her explorations within, the dimming of the lights suggests that her quest for spiritual light has been in vain.

More generally, the final tableau casts doubt on God's existence and benevolence to man. If there is a God, Beckett seems to be asking, why has he denied May the inner light she has sought? Why does He allow the protracted suffering of individuals like May's invalid mother and the people like May who look after them? Why was it necessary for His only begotten Son to die a lingering death on

the Cross? As in other plays which embody his "shape of ideas" approach, Beckett hints at two cynical possibilities: either there is no God, in which case disappointment and suffering are simply inescapable facts of life; or God exists and is inexplicably cruel to His creatures.

4

Not I is not easy to follow in performance. Insistent that Mouth deliver her monologue at a rapid pace, Beckett told the actor Hume Cronyn in 1972: "I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece would work on the necessary emotions of the audience rather than appealing to their intellect."³⁵ The play on stage elicits from us, as from its only other character, Auditor, a feeling of "helpless compassion" (NI, p. 215) for Mouth's apparent madness; but it is not until we turn to the text that we begin to understand her condition clearly.

Working from the text, critics have interpreted in various ways Mouth's experience of being taken over by an involuntary voice, her compulsive need to describe the experience, and her refusal to relinquish the third person. Enoch Brater has offered the most interesting interpretation to date, however, in arguing that the play dramatises her confrontation with her own Jungian "shadow."³⁶ Brater's account is especially attractive in that we know from Deirdre Bair's biography that Beckett has been interested in Jungian theory since the thirties.³⁷ Yet there are two flaws in Brater's argument. First, because it is based not on Jung's own writings, but on a commentary, it takes no account of passages in Jung which

suggest different interpretative possibilities from the one offered. Second, because Brater wrote his article prior to Beckett's translation of Not I into French, there is no mention in it of an important difference between the French and English texts--namely, that there is a greater concentration of religious language in the translation than in the original.³⁸ A careful reading of the translation and Jung reveals that the play is open not only to a variety of Jungian interpretations, but to the possibility that it is concerned with a mystical experience, its title deriving from St. Paul's repeated comment in his epistles that it is "not I" who write, "but Christ [who] liveth in me."³⁹ In accordance with Beckett's "shape of ideas" approach to drama, that comment becomes the thematic basis for Not I: through St. Paul and Jung (who alludes to the comment in one of his essays), Beckett raises questions in the play about the existence and benevolence of God and, by implication, about the limits of human knowledge.

Brater bases his discussion of Jung on a commentary by M. Esther Harding, and in particular, on Harding's account of the Jungian process of individuation.⁴⁰ Through this process--as we saw in Chapter Seven--the individual becomes aware of certain unconscious elements in his mind and ultimately achieves a more complete understanding of himself. In Jung's own words, individuation is a matter of "'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realisation,'"⁴¹ which involves coming to terms with various inner personalities, including the shadow, the anima, and the ego. The shadow is "the character that summarises a person's uncontrolled emotional manifestations":⁴² it is the unconscious Hyde lurking within the conscious Jekyll, the Caliban within Ariel. The anima is a personality that exists only in

men, and represents the sum of a man's latent feminine characteristics; in woman, its counterpart is the animus, a personality that embodies unconscious masculinity.⁴³ Once the individual has come to terms with these and other unconscious personalities, he discovers that his ego, the centrum of his conscious mind, inadequately represents the totality of his psyche. This purely conscious "I" cedes its place to a "superordinate" ("Relations," p. 238) personality, the Self, and the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind find themselves bound together in a "new equilibrium, a new centring of the total personality" ("Relations," p. 219).

Brater rightly points out that "Mouth is an image not of wholeness, of a reconciliation of opposites, but of fragmentation and destruction."⁴⁴ Her repeated experience of being taken over by a voice, an "I" she refuses to acknowledge as her own, may at first seem reminiscent of the Self's displacement of the ego at the end of the process of individuation; but her anguish at the experience is inconsistent with the sense of peace that is meant to arise at the end of the Jungian process. Mouth, argues Brater, has yet to "become whole";⁴⁵ she is still at the stage of having to contend with her shadow. Her anguish is nowhere more evident than in her descriptions of the occasions on which the voice starts to speak. There is, she tells us, "no stopping it . . . she who but a moment before . . . but a moment! . . . could not make a sound . . . no sound of any kind . . . now can't stop . . . imagine! . . . can't stop the stream . . . and the whole brain begging . . . something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop . . . pause a moment . . . if only for a moment . . . and no response . . . as if it hadn't heard . . .

or couldn't . . . couldn't pause a second . . . like maddened . . ."

(NI, p. 220). It is arguable, given this passage, that Mouth has been taken over by her shadow--the sum of her "uncontrolled emotional manifestations"--for it is clear that the maddened voice is quite out of control; moreover, we discover later in the play that the voice has on at least one occasion been associated with involuntary weeping.

But although it is consistent with the text to suggest, as Brater does, that Mouth's involuntary voice belongs to her shadow, other possibilities also present themselves. It may be, for example, that the voice is that of Mouth's animus, a personality Jung describes as being a purveyor of opinions--"opinions scraped together more or less unconsciously from childhood on, and compressed into a canon of average truth, justice, and reasonableness . . ."

("Relations," p. 206). Mouth is "coming up to . . . seventy" (NI, p. 216), and has for many years refused to believe in a "merciful . . . God" (NI, p. 217). Nevertheless, her childhood belief that "God is love" (NI, p. 221) has returned with her experiences of the voice: these have all but persuaded that she has sinned, and the voice is capable of saying the words that will occasion divine forgiveness. Why should the voice speak, she theorises, if not because there is "something she had to tell. . . . something she didn't know herself . . . wouldn't know if she heard . . . then forgiven . . . God is love . . ."

(NI, p. 221). The words she needs to say may well be unrecognisable to her when they are uttered, because they are rooted in her unconscious; yet she has an obscure and naive faith that once she has hit on them, they will find favour with the just and merciful God of her childhood.

If Mouth's voice does belong to her animus, it may well be that Not I is concerned with a stage in the process of individuation; however, it is equally possible that Mouth has entered into a quite different process--that of becoming a schizophrenic. "[In the] schizophrenic condition," Jung stressed in the lecture Beckett attended, "[various inner personalities] emancipate themselves from conscious control to such an extent that they become visible and audible. They appear as visions, they speak in voices which are like the voices of definite people."⁴⁶ What draws us back to the idea that Mouth is involved in the individuation process is the way she describes her first experience of the voice. Out one April morning gathering flowers, Mouth, as she says, suddenly "found herself in the dark . . . and a ray of light came and went . . . came and went . . . such as the moon might cast . . . drifting . . . in and out of cloud . . ." (NI, p. 217). Mouth's inclusion of the moon in this partly figurative description of her experience is significant, for dream and fantasy visions of luminosities are, Jung tells us, of great interest to the psychologist. "If the luminosity appears in monadic form as a single star, sun, [moon], or eye, it readily assumes the shape of a mandala and must then be interpreted as the [S]elf. It has nothing whatever to do with 'double consciousness' [i.e., schizophrenia], because there is no indication of dissociated personality. On the contrary, the symbols of the [S]elf have a 'uniting' character."⁴⁷

It must be observed, however, that Mouth's description is not of a single, clearly-defined light, as in Jung, but is instead of a flickering moon intermittently hidden by cloud. What this suggests is that she has come almost to the end of the individuation process--

almost to the emergence of the Self--but has not yet attained complete self-realisation. A balance of conscious and unconscious has not yet been struck, and thus the Self--the "I" not altogether consciously her own⁴⁸--has yet to take full control. This is evident from Jung's description of the final stage of individuation, where the person concerned is meant to experience "a change of feeling similar to that . . . [of] a father to whom a son has been born, a change known to us from the testimony of St. Paul: 'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' The symbol of 'Christ' as 'son of man' is an analogous psychic experience of a higher spiritual being who is invisibly born in the individual, a pneumatic body which is to serve us as a future dwelling, a body which, as Paul says, is put on like a garment."⁴⁹

Mouth experiences neither the joy of a father to whom a son has been born, nor the the retrospective joy of a St. Paul aware of the presence of Christ within himself. Rather, her experience is of the shock and momentary loss of sight of Saul on the road to Damascus--of Saul who found it hard to "kick against the pricks."⁵⁰ In describing the endpoint of the individuation process, Jung emphasises that his comparison of self-realisation to the discovery of Christ or God within is merely a convenient way of indicating how profound this experience is. Elsewhere he suggests that God may not even exist--that He may be only "an historical and intellectual bogey or a philosophical sentimentality" ("Relations, p. 237). Similarly, it may be that Mouth's vision is devoid of any religious significance; however, the Pauline quality of the play's title and the peculiar nature of Mouth's suffering oblige us to consider the possibility that she has undergone a mystical conversion. Certainly there is a

marked similarity between St. Paul's conversion and what Mouth experiences: like the saint, she hears a voice sounding in her ears, and is subjected both to a lapse of vision and a sense of being bathed in an unaccountable light. Moreover, where Saul was stricken down on his journey to Damascus for his persecution of the Christians, Mouth believes, as we have seen, that she is perhaps being punished for her sins.

On the other hand, Mouth admits to having realised long after her vision that, at the time, "she was not suffering . . . imagine! . . . not suffering! . . . indeed could not remember . . . when she had suffered less" (NI, p. 217). Her experience of an apparent mixture of pleasure and pain has little to do with St. Paul: it reminds us instead of "'the wound of Unmeasured Love'" described by St. Catherine of Genoa, or the "'wound full of delight'" of another mystic, Madame Guyon.⁵¹ According to Evelyn Underhill, this "wound" is characteristically inflicted on mystics in the first stage of their journey in search of God--a stage which might be described as "[the] awakening of the Self to Consciousness of Divine Reality" (My, p. 169). The journey culminates in an experience of God which writers have described metaphorically in a number of ways: as arrival at the Celestial City, for example; or, in one instance, as "the 'Marriage of Luna and Sol'--the fusion of human and divine spirit" (My, p. 149). Mouth's vision of figurative moonlight is arguably a sign of the awakening of her spirit to a new consciousness of God--a consciousness nonetheless obscured by what Walter Hilton has referred to as "'the cloud of unknowing'" (My, p. 349).

Another metaphor for coming to know God is the metaphor of birth. St. Paul describes his conversion in terms of Christ's being

born within him; Eckhart, similarly, tells us that "'[when] the soul brings forth the Son, . . . it is happier than Mary'" (My, p. 122). The notion of spiritual birth (or re-birth)⁵² is hinted at in Not I, in that Mouth's visionary experience takes place in April--April being traditionally associated with Spring, and in some years (depending on when Easter is celebrated) with the resurrection of Christ. Brater suggests that the April of this play derives from Eliot: "Mouth," he says, "mixes memory with desire, reflecting her own ambivalence about the sudden change which has taken place in the field. With her 'face in the grass,' perhaps 'she' has been raped. . . ." He goes on to point out that when Alan Schneider asked Beckett whether Mouth had been raped, Beckett "didn't say yes and . . . didn't say no."⁵³ Deirdre Bair has since revealed, however, that when Jessica Tandy, an actress who played Mouth, asked the same question of Beckett, he was horrified. "'How could you think of such a thing!' he said. 'No, no, not at all--it wasn't that at all.'"⁵⁴ Though we can only speculate on what Beckett intended, it seems relevant to point out that some mystics described their experience of God in sexual terms.⁵⁵

Others, like St. Paul, have described hearing voices--voices that have broken abruptly in upon their ordinary everyday activities. Julian of Norwich and St. Catherine of Siena, for example, describe not only hearing the voice of God, but replying to it; St. Teresa and Ana de la Encarnacion tell of writing under God's dictation.⁵⁶ Their experiences have obvious relevance to Not I, where the "buzzing" (NI, p. 217) in Mouth's head transforms itself into an uncontrollable voice not consciously her own, a voice which sometimes raises questions to which she replies. Interestingly, her lack of

control over the voice and over her own bodily movements are prefigured in Schopenhauer's description of the mystical experience in The World as Will and Idea.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, Schopenhauer believes that we are all subject to an inner striving force, "the will to live," which impels us to seek out sources of pleasure and to avoid pain. As will-motivated beings, we generally treat other people in terms of the gratification of our own physical and psychological needs: we are all basically selfish. Yet there are some men--ascetic mystics--who choose to renounce what the world has to offer in order to live closer to God. They renounce the world, and after a long period of asceticism, the will "turns round": it "no longer asserts its own nature, . . . but denies it" (WWI, I, 490). With this turning of the will, the individual mystic achieves an indifference to worldly pleasure so profound that he ceases to perceive his surroundings, and ceases, too, to dwell on his own existence. "[We] can understand the meaning of Madame Guion," comments Schopenhauer, "when towards the end of her autobiography she often expresses herself thus: 'Everything is alike to me; I cannot will anything more: often I know not whether I exist or not'" (WWI, I, 505). Normally Mouth is able to will her behaviour--to scream, for example, "should she feel so inclined . . . scream . . . [Screams.]" (NI, p. 218). But her visionary experience (the result, perhaps, of a life of poverty-dictated asceticism) brings with it a marked dissipation of will; she says that it made her feel "so dulled . . . she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling" (NI, p. 217). Similarly, the voice that takes her over works independently of her brain, as though her brain

were disconnected from the "machine" (NI, p. 220)--the body--it usually controls. When it speaks, it is of "nothing she could tell" (NI, p. 222); in other words, it speaks of an ineffable experience like the mystic's of union with God.

The sense that her experience is religious in character is conveyed more clearly in Beckett's French translation of Not I than in the English.⁵⁷ "[H]ow she survived! . . . even shopping" (NI, p. 219), comments Mouth; for Bouche, survival is a miracle: "à se demander comment . . . quel miracle . . . elle avait pu survivre . . . même faisant ses courses" (PM, p. 87).⁵⁸ Mouth envisions that "she'll be purged" (NI, p. 221) of the need to speak eventually; Bouche that "elle sera sauvée . . . peine purgée" (PM, p. 91). Salvation appears as an explicit prospect in the French text, but not in the English. Mouth gathers flowers "to make a ball" (NI, p. 216), while Bouche picks them "pour en faire une couronne" (PM, p. 82), a crown perhaps reminiscent of Christ's crown of thorns. And where Mouth speaks early in the play of "something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop" (NI, p. 220), Bouche mentions prayer: "et le cerveau plus qu'une prière . . . là quelque part une prière" (PM, p. 89).

Yet, in spite of all this, and in spite of the fact that Auditor is reminiscent of a priest in confessional, it is by no means certain that Mouth's experience is necessarily the mystic's of union with God. It is true that she hears a voice speaking through her, and that she sometimes pauses to answer questions put to her inwardly, as in this passage early in the play: " . . . suddenly she realised . . . words . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! (NI, p. 219). But although dialogue of this kind is similar to that held between

mystics and God, it is not necessarily the same. "'I am really terrified,'" St. John of the Cross once remarked, "'by what passes among us in these days. Anyone who has barely begun to meditate, if he becomes conscious of words of this kind during his self-recollection, pronounces them forthwith to be the work of God; and, convinced that they are so, goes about proclaiming 'God has told me this,' or 'I have had that answer from God.' But all this is illusion and fancy: such an one has only been speaking to himself" (*My*, p. 275). Mouth's involuntary voice may be genuinely mystical--the voice of God, for example--but it may also be that of a spurious mystical experience, or, quite simply, of madness.

The extent of Mouth's insight into her condition is limited by a number of factors. Her apparent lack of education--and, in particular, of background in psychology--militate against her attempts to articulate her experiences and theorise about them. But even if Mouth were extensively trained in psychology, she would still be hampered by the problem of subjectivity--the problem, as Jung says, that her "psyche, being the object of scientific observation and judgment, is at the same time its subject, the means by which [it makes] such observations."⁵⁹ The mind may have any number of unconscious reasons for concealing itself from itself: it is significant that, in a monologue devoted to giving expression to what she has learned about her experiences, Mouth repeatedly says that certain insights came to her "long after" (*NI*, p. 218 and passim) the events concerned. What this suggests is that her mind is only very slowly and fitfully revealing its secrets, and may never reveal them all. To a psychiatrist, it is unthinkable, in fact, for an individual to achieve a complete understanding of the nature and

contents of his mind: a part of it must always remain shrouded in mystery.

If Auditor is a psychiatrist, as various critics have said, it may be that he has formulated a more objective and sophisticated view of Mouth's condition than she has been able to, and that his gestures of "helpless compassion" (NI, p. 215) are meant to suggest she is incurably insane. Alternatively, if he is a priest, his gestures suggest a traditional answer to the problem of evil. "God may seem cruel in His behaviour to Mouth," Auditor conveys, "but His apparent cruelty is merely a small part of His inscrutable, though ultimately beneficent plan." That his gestures "[lessen] with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible at third" (NI, p. 215) is perhaps ascribable to the fact that he is finding it harder and harder to believe in this orthodox view of suffering. In the French text, Auditeur's repeated gesture is "fait de blâme et de pitié impuissante" (PM, p. 95). Here disapproval is mixed with compassion; but whether Auditeur disapproves of Bouche or of God is not clear.⁶⁰ The original English title, Not I, suggests that his blame is reserved for Bouche: in light of it, we have a sense that, like St. Paul, the play's main character must suffer temporarily for her sins, but that her suffering will be for God's greater glory.

The cynic will object, however, that in her life of neglect, poverty and psychological torment, Bouche has already suffered enough, and that unlike St. Paul, she is too old and inarticulate to be of use in spreading the gospel. The cynic might also point out, as Hersch Zeifman does, that Mouth's inclusion of the moon in the description of her experience of illumination is possibly meant to recall "the exiled Cain [of More Pricks Than Kicks], branded for life

and doomed to suffer"⁶¹ by a cruel and arbitrary God. Mouth's sufferings may seem peculiar to herself, or, at least, to those who share her particular psychological malady.⁶² Yet the sense that she is perhaps being punished not for any personal sin or crime (her shoplifting having already been dealt with in court), but for some more generalised human fault, ensures the play's universality. As we have seen in earlier chapters, two of Beckett's favourite lines of verse are that "The greatest crime of man/ Is that he ever was born."⁶³ The lines, from Calderon, are quoted in several places in The World as Will and Idea;⁶⁴ at one point, they are followed by the rhetorical question, "Why should [birth] not be a crime, since, according to an eternal law, death follows upon it?" (WWI, I, 458). With characteristic cynicism about God's existence and mercies, Beckett similarly asks in Not I: "Why should birth not be a crime, since so many people, like Mouth, appear to suffer needlessly?" Mouth's dalliance with the idea that she has sinned, and that the voice that speaks through her may finally hit on the words to procure God's forgiveness, is an interpretation of her sufferings that offers hope for the future, and is therefore attractive to her. But it is not necessarily the correct interpretation, as her bitter laughter at the thought of the existence of a merciful God testifies. Through her laughter and Auditor's gestures, Beckett urges us to consider the two alternative possibilities raised in his other "shape of ideas" plays: either there is no God, and our suffering is purely a matter of chance; or God exists and is inexplicably cruel to His creatures.

NOTES

¹Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year," International Theatre Annual, No. 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), 153.

²In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 192, Beryl Fletcher et al. reveal that Not I was written in English in the spring of 1972, and was first published in February, 1973 in London by Faber & Faber. On p. 201, they note that That Time was written in English between June 1974 and August 1975, and was first published in New York by Grove Press in 1976. Finally, on p. 207, they note that Footfalls was written in 1975, and was, like That Time, first published in New York by Grove Press in 1976.

³James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: the Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), p. 213. Hereafter cited as Frescoes.

⁴Here Beckett is quoting from A la recherche du temps perdu (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), III, 1048.

⁵See Walter D. Asmus, "Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television: Rehearsal Notes for the German Première of Beckett's That Time and Footfalls at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, Berlin," trans. Helen Watanabe, Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 2 (Summer 1977), 92.

⁶See Samuel Beckett, Cette fois (Paris: Minuit, 1978).

⁷That Time, in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 228. All quotations from That Time, Not I and Footfalls are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text, preceded by TT, NI and FF, respectively. Our sense that Listener is on his deathbed is strengthened by an examination of the play's manuscripts. As James Knowlson points out (in Frescoes, p. 206), up to the fifth typescript, Listener is described as having his head framed by a pillow.

⁸S.E. Gontarski, "'Making Yourself All Up Again': the Composition of Samuel Beckett's That Time," Modern Drama, 23 (June 1980), 116. For a fuller discussion of the play's triads, see Antoni Libera, "Structure and Pattern in That Time," trans. Aniela Korzeniowska, Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 6 (Autumn 1980), 81-89.

⁹Gontarski discusses the evolution of this grouping in the article just cited. In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 203, Beryl Fletcher et al. comment that in his grouping of the three memories, "Beckett does not appear to have any particular kind of sequence (such as bell-ringing) in mind. His own comment to the authors was that the control is stylistic through the technique of association; he wished, he said, to make each passage

verbally interesting and to provide it with some associative connection with the next."

¹⁰Beckett's interest in "Tintern Abbey" is evident as early as Watt, written in the early forties. (See Watt (London: John Calder, 1970), p. 98, where Beckett speaks of "little acts of kindness and of love," echoing ll. 35-36 of Wordsworth's poem). In The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 221, Rubin Rabinovitz identifies some allusions to other Wordsworth poems in Murphy, Beckett's novel of the early thirties.

¹¹William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in Wordsworth, William and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads (1798, 1800; rpt. London: Methuen, 1963), p. 116. All quotations from the poem are from this edition; line numbers are given in the text, preceded by TA.

¹²Gontarski, 114.

¹³In William Wordsworth: the Early Years, 1770-1803 (London: Oxford U.P., 1957), p. 402, Mary Moorman observes that on the tour which included Tintern Abbey in 1798, Wordsworth and Dorothy walked over fifty miles in three days.

¹⁴See St. Luke 10.30-7. Asmus, 93, says that at a rehearsal of the German premiere of That Time, Beckett cited the Bible as his source for the passage beginning "the passers pausing to gape . . ." He was unable to remember more exactly where it was from, but agreed with Klaus Herm, the actor playing Listener, that it could have been from St. Luke.

¹⁵"The Old Cumberland Beggar," l. 160, in Lyrical Ballads, p. 210 (see note 11 for edition).

¹⁶"Burnt Norton," ll. 47-51, in T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), p. 15. All quotations from "Burnt Norton" are from this edition; line numbers are given in the text, preceded by BN.

¹⁷William Wordsworth, The Prelude: a Parallel Text, ed. J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), Book V, ll. 389-42 (1805 version); ll. 364-97 (1850 version), pp. 188-91. An earlier version of this passage appeared in the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads; this may be where Beckett first encountered it.

¹⁸Jean Martin, the actor who played Krapp in a 1970 production of Krapp's Last Tape directed by Beckett, has said that "Sam insisted very often on a presence in the darkness, a continual presence, of someone who attracts Krapp's attention, of someone who makes him turn his head to the left at certain moments, slowly. Once Sam went so far as to say--I am sure I remember this correctly: 'it is death who is waiting for him there.'" (James Knowlson, "An Interview with Jean Martin," in Theatre Workbook 1: Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (London: Brutus Books, 1980), p. 82.

¹⁹Frescoes, p. 213.

²⁰Frescoes, p. 210.

²¹Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: a Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 10. See also Asmus, 83.

²²Bair, p. 636.

²³See Enoch Brater, "Fragment and Beckett's Form in That Time and Footfalls," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 2 (Summer 1977), 80.

²⁴Beckett's interest in Eliot dates back to at least 1934, the year he published "Recent Irish Poetry," an essay in which he praises The Waste Land. See "Recent Irish Poetry," reprinted in Samuel Beckett, Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1984), p. 70.

²⁵In Frescoes, p. 236, n. 42, James Knowlson observes that in "Footfalls, London, Faber & Faber, 1976, May paces seven steps across the stage, but this was corrected in the Royal Court performance to nine steps, to give greater width. The Faber text was set before the production in May 1976. In Ends and Odds, London, Faber & Faber, 1977, the text is amended to nine, although an error has crept in on p. 33, where the steps are mistakenly left as seven. In the French premiere of Pas . . . at the Th!atre d'Orsay (11 April 1978) nine steps were also adopted."

²⁶See Helen Gardner, The Composition of Four Quartets (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 39.

²⁷In Frescoes, p. 224, James Knowlson comments that the first scene in the play is "clearly that of a 'dying mother' and is referred to as such by Beckett in a manuscript note."

²⁸In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 209, Beryl Fletcher et al. comment that "V's words are not heard by M, who in the Berlin production (which Beckett directed after the London one) muttered to herself to make the point clear to the spectator."

²⁹See Asmus, 85.

³⁰Cf. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (1860-61; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 93, 321, 325 and 413.

³¹Asmus, 83. Bair, pp. 208-10, provides an account of Beckett's attendance at the lecture, which impressed him deeply.

³²C.G. Jung, "The Tavistock Lectures," in The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings, trans. R.F.C. Hull (1935; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), Lecture 3, p. 96.

³³See "On the Nature of the Psyche" (1947), in C.G. Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 205-6.

³⁴See Derek Traversi, T.S. Eliot: the Longer Poems (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 99.

³⁵Quoted in Bair, p. 625.

³⁶Enoch Brater, "The 'I' in Beckett's Not I," Twentieth Century Literature, 20 (1974), 189-200.

³⁷See Bair, pp. 174-93 and passim for an account of Beckett's interest in Jung, and pp. 208-12 for information about his attendance at the third of Jung's Tavistock Lectures.

³⁸All quotations from the French text, first published in 1974, are from Oh les beaux jours, suivi de Pas moi (Paris: Minuit, 1975). Page numbers are given in the text, preceded by PM.

³⁹Galatians 2.20. See also 1 Corinthians 7.10 and 1 Corinthians 15.10. St. Paul may be the source, too, of an important statement made by the narrator at the beginning of The Unnamable: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me" (U, p. 291).

⁴⁰See M. Esther Harding, The "I" and the "Not I": a Study in the Development of Consciousness (New York, Bollingen Foundation, distributed by Pantheon Books, 1965), pp. 12-14 and passim.

⁴¹C.G. Jung, "The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 171. Hereafter, page numbers of quotations from this work will be given in the text, preceded by "Relations."

⁴²C.G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, trans. Stanley Dell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940), p. 20.

⁴³See "Relations," pp. 204-09.

⁴⁴Brater, p. 196.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶C.G. Jung, "The Tavistock Lectures," Lecture 3, p. 72.

⁴⁷C.G. Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche," p. 199.

⁴⁸The Self is a partly conscious, partly unconscious personality. If Mouth has come to the end of the individuation process, it can be argued that the Self's purely unconscious aspect is represented by her involuntary voice, which speaks of scenes from the past which she has either forgotten or repressed. The voice that speaks the monologue seems to represent the conscious side of her self; but because it speaks under a sense of inner obligation (where previously Mouth was mute), this voice is in part unconscious. No longer the person she was before her involuntary voice started to speak, and unable to fathom what she has become, Mouth refers to both her involuntary voice and to herself, past and present, as "she."

⁴⁹C.G. Jung, "Commentary on 'The Secret of the Golden Flower'" (1929), in Alchemical Studies, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 52.

⁵⁰Acts 9.5, the source, as we saw in Chapter Three, of the title of More Pricks Than Kicks.

⁵¹Quoted in Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 196. Hereafter, page numbers of quotations from this work will be given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation My.

⁵²Since Mouth is mute until her first visionary experience, it is arguable that her spiritual or psychological birth dates from it; or, to use the Jungian phrase that made such an impression on Beckett, that, until the April morning, she had "never been born entirely" (Lecture 3, p. 96). The fact that her involuntary voice returns on dark winter evenings suggest that Mouth has a continuing need for spiritual illumination.

⁵³Brater, p. 190.

⁵⁴Bair, p. 624.

⁵⁵See, for example, St. John of the Cross's poem, "Stanzas of the Soul," in which union with God is described as follows: "Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!/ Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,/ There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze." (Quoted from The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1953), I, 326).

⁵⁶See My, p. 227 and pp. 294-95.

⁵⁷Hersh Zeifman identifies the Christian images and associations in the English text in "Being and Non-Being: Samuel Beckett's Not I," Modern Drama, 19 (Mar. 1976), 35-46. He does not, however, mention the French text.

⁵⁸Similarly, "how she survived! . . . that time in court" (NI, p. 221) is translated as "quel miracle . . . elle avait pu survivre . . . ce jour au tribunal" (PM, p. 92).

⁵⁹Lecture 1, p. 7.

⁶⁰In a review of Beckett's own 1978 production of Pas moi ("Pas and Pas moi at the Théâtre d'Orsay, Paris, 11 April 1978," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 4 (Spring 1979), 72-73), James Knowlson points out that "Beckett introduced a new, final gesture with Auditor placing his hands over his ears at the end of the play, unable, it would appear, to bear any long Mouth's confession" (p. 72). Whether this gesture is meant to convey Auditor's disapproval of Mouth or of the God who created her is, of course, as ambiguous as the gestures specified in the published text. Knowlson also points out that in his 1976 production at the Petite Salle, Beckett had so much trouble

lighting the figure of Auditor that he excluded him altogether. It is clear from the 1978 production that he felt Auditor must make an appearance.

⁶¹Zeifman, p. 37.

⁶²In "A Poetics of Radical Displacement: Samuel Beckett Coming up to Seventy," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 17 (1975), 219-38, H. Porter Abbott argues that Mouth's is "the predicament of the writer" (234), and in particular, the predicament of Samuel Beckett, since Mouth is a partly autobiographical figure.

⁶³Beckett quotes these lines in the original Spanish in his essay on Proust (P, p. 67).

⁶⁴Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909), I, 328 and 458; III, 420.

CHAPTER TWELVE

RECENT PLAYS FOR THE STAGE

1

Since Footfalls, Beckett has written a total of five plays for the stage and four for television.¹ While the television plays are short and insubstantial--they are either minor variations on earlier plays or equally minor experiments to see what effects may be achieved in the televisual medium²--the stage plays are of greater interest and sophistication. Like most of Beckett's earlier works, his recent plays for the stage--A Piece of Monologue, Rockaby, Ohio Impromptu and What Where--are concerned with the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

As in his "shape of ideas" plays, so in A Piece of Monologue, Beckett draws attention to the limits of knowledge by suggesting cynical alternatives to the belief that God exists and is benevolently disposed to man.³ These alternatives are implicit in the strange ritual the play's single character, an old man known to us only as Speaker, has performed every night for many years.⁴ Ostensibly an abstract meditation on the meaning of life and death, the ritual ends when "the rip word"--the word "begone" (APM, p. 269)--enters Speaker's mind. At this point, the metaphorical veil concealing the truth about his inquiry is ripped away to reveal that he has been concerned not with a generalised metaphysical question, but with the imminence of his own death.⁵

Early in the play Speaker tells us that one of the walls of his room was once covered in pictures of his mother, father and other former "loved ones," but that he has torn them all down: "Not at one sweep. No sudden fit of . . . no word. Ripped from the wall and torn to shreds one by one. Over the years" (APM, p. 266). It is important to note that Speaker has ripped the pictures from the wall over a period of time, rather than in a sudden fit brought on by the thought of a single "rip word," for in A Piece of Monologue, the word "rip" is almost always used to refer to a metaphorical rather than literal act of ripping. Significantly, it often refers to Speaker's habit of "ripping up old stories."

Beckett uses this phrase in a figurative sense when he reports in Murphy that his main character "belonged to no profession or trade; . . . sometimes had the price of a concert; believed that the future held great things in store for him; and never ripped up old stories" (Mu, p. 16). What Beckett means here is not that Murphy is a writer who never destroys his work, but rather that he is someone who never tells stories about other people with a view to discrediting them.⁶ As in many of his other novels and plays, Beckett alludes extensively to eighteenth and nineteenth century literature in Murphy, and is using the idea of ripping up old stories in the same sense as, for example, Fielding in Tom Jones or Byron in "A Vision of Judgement."

In Book IX, Chapter Six of Tom Jones, a landlord taxed by his wife with "'Don't you remember what happened about seven years ago?'," replies: "'Nay, my dear, . . . don't rip up old stories. Come, come, all's well, and I am sorry for what I have done.'"⁷

Similarly, in Byron's "The Vision of Judgement," John Wilkes is asked to testify against George III, and in turn asks:

'Why

 Must I turn evidence? In faith, not I.
 Besides, I beat him hollow at the last,
 With all his Lords and Commons: in the sky
 I don't like ripping up old stories, since
 His conduct was but natural in a prince.'⁸

While Wilkes is hesitant about discrediting his king, Speaker is uninhibited about "ripping up old stories" about God. So familiar is he with the stories he tells, however, that he presents them in a highly concentrated form, leaving us the task of filling in missing details. Moreover, he sprinkles his stories with brief allusions to various works of literature; the combined effect is to cast doubt on the existence and benevolence of God.

Speaker's stories are included in his description of the ritual he performs each night. This begins when he lights a kerosene lamp and stares at the east wall of his room, then beyond it in imagination at the "Empty dark" outside. After a time the word "Birth" (APM, p. 267) enters his mind; when it does, he begins to meditate on the meaning of life and death, and has a strange visionary experience. Amongst other things, he envisions the funeral of one or more of his former "loved ones" (in context it seems that he may be conflating the details of several funerals):

Grey light. Rain pelting. Umbrellas round a grave. Seen from above. Streaming black canopies. Black ditch beneath. Rain bubbling in the black mud. Empty for the moment. That place beneath (APM, p. 268).

Earlier, Speaker has described the rain outside his window as "dropping gentle on the place beneath" (APM, p. 266), and there, as

in the phrase "That place beneath" in the funeral scene, he is echoing Portia's famous speech in The Merchant of Venice:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath.
.
It is enthroned in the heart of kings;
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.¹⁰

The funeral is "Seen from above," as though by God; yet it is apparent that God has not intervened to spare the mourners the inconvenience of a heavy rainstorm, so that they are obliged to fend off His "mercy" with their umbrellas. More importantly, Speaker is raising the question here as to how a merciful God could allow a son to love his parents, or, by extension, a man his wife or a woman her husband, only to end that love abruptly in death.¹¹

Prior to the funeral scene he envisions a pair of disembodied hands lighting a lamp--presumably a lamp like the one he himself has lit at the beginning of his private ritual. Though the hands' act of illumination puts us in mind of part of the story of Creation in Genesis--"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light"--the fact that the on-stage lamp is "skull-sized" (APM, p. 265) suggests that it is also closely associated with Speaker's birth and imminent death.

"Birth was the death of him," says Speaker in the opening line of the play. "Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the [coffin] lid to come" (APM, p. 265). However long an individual's life may be--and Speaker himself has lived for about eighty years¹²--it is, as Pozzo says in Waiting for Godot, a mere glimmer in the vast dark of eternity.¹³ The fact that the on-stage lamp begins to fail some

thirty seconds before the end of the play suggests that its remaining light corresponds to what is left of Speaker's life. By contrast with the lamplight, the "Faint diffuse light" (APM, p. 265) that pervades Speaker's room--the light that emanates from an unspecified source--appears to represent the lives of successive generations of man.¹⁴ Its presence reminds us that although the individual life is quickly extinguished, the human species continues to thrive.

But Waiting for Godot and Genesis are not the only "stories" being "ripped up" in this passage; in "Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come," Speaker is echoing Richard II:

. . . within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable; and humour'd thus
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and--farewell king!¹⁵

If Speaker could be certain that the vanity of life is only apparent --that God exists and ensures that our time on earth has meaning--A Piece of Monologue would be very different in tone. Speaker adopts a bitterly cynical tone in the play because he has come to the conclusion that, contrary to the "old stories" told in the Bible and elsewhere, God does not exist, or if He does, has made no effort to confer meaning or purpose on human activity. The phrase he uses repeatedly when speaking of his parents--"he all but said the loved ones" (APM, p. 266 and passim) suggests not only that he cannot love the two people who brought him into a world where life is brief and

pointless, but that, if there is a God, He has no love to spare for His creatures.¹⁶

Once the lamp has been lit by the two visionary hands, Speaker hears in imagination "A cry. Stifled by nasal" (APM, p. 268). At this point, as later in the play, he is echoing Genesis 2.7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."¹⁷ If there is a God, Speaker implies, He has done nothing to ensure that the individual human life has meaning: it begins and ends pointlessly, in a single breath. The fact that his pictures of "the loved ones" now lie in shreds in the dust in his room recalls God's comment to Adam in Genesis 3.19: ". . . dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."¹⁸

Near the end of his vision, Speaker finds himself "staring beyond half hearing what he's saying. He? The words falling from his mouth" (APM, p. 268). Speaker queries the use of the third-person pronoun because he is aware that the words he has been uttering relate to something he would not consciously choose to talk about: his own death. Evidently the words "falling from his mouth" are spoken involuntarily, and eventually lead to the "rip word":

Stock still head haught staring beyond. . . . Waiting on the rip word. Stands there staring beyond at that black veil lips quivering to half-heard words. Treating of other matters. Trying to treat of other matters. Till half hears there are no other matters. . . . Never but the one matter. The dead and gone. The dying and the going. From the word go. The word begone. (APM, p. 269)

Here, at the end of the play, Speaker notices that the light of the lamp--of his life--is beginning to fade, but that the "Faint diffuse light" (APM, p. 265) that has pervaded his room--the light of successive generations of man--continues to shine at its usual level

of brightness. Clearly it is his own death to which he must reconcile himself, as he envisions the lamp fading to extinction: "The globe alone. Not the other. . . . Unutterably faint. The globe alone. Alone gone" (APM, p. 269).

Interestingly, Beckett's French translation of A Piece of Monologue, Solo, omits the phrase "Waiting on the rip word" (APM, p. 269) altogether.¹⁹ The obvious explanation for this is that Beckett was unable to find a French phrase that would convey the idea both of ripping up old stories and of ripping away the metaphorical veil that conceals Speaker's true purpose from himself. However, the fact that other, more easily translated phrases are also omitted from Solo suggests that when he rendered A Piece of Monologue into French, Beckett was anxious to avoid creating the wrong impression about the status of Speaker's vision. In the original English version of the play, it is evident that the vision originates in Speaker's mind, and is a product of his dissatisfaction with the part God plays--if there is a God--in conferring meaning and purpose on human life. Our sense that he is dissatisfied depends in large part on our correctly interpreting the play's allusions--especially its allusions to the Bible and Shakespeare.

Beckett seems to have recognised that a French reader would not associate the French for "grin"--the word "rictus"--with the passage from Richard II quoted above, and he therefore translates "Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since" (APM, p. 265) as "Sa naissance fut sa perte. Rictus de macchabée depuis" (Solo, p. 30). In French he alludes not to Shakespeare, but to the story of Judas Maccabaeus, who in the first century B.C. led the Jews in their revolt against the Syrian leader, Antiochus Epiphanes.²⁰ The sense

that life is subject to destruction from within, as in the quotation from Richard II given above, is thus maintained in French; however, Beckett omits from Solo the phrase "That nevoid smile" (APM, p. 267), perhaps because, with the allusion to Shakespeare lost, he could think of no French phrase to link the smile to Schopenhauer's observation that life is a crime punishable by death.²¹ Again, it is doubtful whether the French reader would recognise in Solo's "Ou en chute douce sur l'ici-bas"²² an echo of Portia's speech, for "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/ Upon the place beneath" is given quite differently in some of the best known French translations of Shakespeare.²³ Omitting these two allusions to Shakespeare alters the tone of the play in translation: a French reader would not realise that the allusion to Richard II is meant to convey that, if He exists, God does nothing to make our lives meaningful. Nor would he be aware that Speaker's allusion to the Merchant of Venice is intended to suggest that God is not the merciful figure Portia claims He is.

In the absence of these cynical Shakespearean allusions, Beckett omits from Solo all mention of the "first word" (APM, pp. 267, 268). He does this because he wants to avoid suggesting that, by association with the opening of the Gospel of St. John—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—the "first word" is part of a God-given vision.²⁴ Also omitted, on two occasions, is the "He?" (APM, pp. 268, 269) with which, as we have seen, Speaker indicates that he is talking involuntarily about his own death.²⁵ To include the "He?" in Solo would be to indicate that the words "falling from [Speaker's] mouth"

(APM, p. 268) are perhaps the words of God. For the sake of avoiding that suggestion in other contexts, Beckett also omits the following:

Again and again. Again and again gone. Mouth agape. A cry.
Stifled by nasal. (APM, p. 268)

Faint cry in his ear. Mouth agape. Closed with hiss of
breath. Lips joined. Feel soft touch of lip on lip. Lip
licking lip. Then parted by cry as before. (APM, p. 268)

Cry. Snuffed with breath of nostrils. Again and again. Again
and again gone. (APM, p. 269)²⁶

If the above passages were to appear in Beckett's French translation, they could create the impression that God repeatedly introduces the sound of a cry into Speaker's mind, only to snuff it out. That in turn would confer the status of revealed truth upon Speaker's embittered opinion that the individual human life is, in the context of eternity, brief and meaningless. When he makes use of allusions to Shakespeare and the Bible to give vent to his cynicism about the existence and benevolence of God, Speaker is doing no more than offer a fallible, human opinion--however assertively he may express himself. In his French translation of A Piece of Monologue, as in the original English, Beckett wants to emphasise that Speaker is casting doubt on God's existence and behaviour to man: he does not want to suggest that his character is divinely inspired. To do that would be to be to imply that Speaker is a prophet rather than a human being whose knowledge is quite ordinarily limited.

Like A Piece of Monologue, Rockaby is concerned with the imminent death of its single character, a "[p]rematurely old" (Ro, p.

273) woman identified only as W.²⁷ Throughout the play, W sits in a rocking-chair, reflecting on the course of her life. Her reflections are conveyed to us by her recorded voice, V, though she begins each of the play's four (informal) parts in her own voice with the word "More," and occasionally speaks aloud, in unison with V, to emphasise the importance of what her inner voice is saying.

In each part of the play, V describes the ending of a phase in W's life. Thus, she begins by telling us about W's decision to stop looking

for another
another like herself
another creature like herself
a little like (Ro, p. 275)

W's efforts to find someone like herself up to this point recall Molloy's desire to ally himself with the character C: " . . . I watched him recede, at grips (myself) with the temptation to get up and follow him, perhaps even to catch up with him one day, so as to know him better, be myself less lonely" (M, p. 11). W also puts us in mind of That Time's main character, Listener. As we saw in the last chapter, Listener spends much of his life in solitude: he does not find comfort in the company of a sister, as Wordsworth does; nor does he find comfort either in the company of any other person, or in belief in God.

Like Listener, W is motivated by a desire not only to assuage her loneliness, but to form a clearer sense of her own identity. Where Listener devises three possible solutions to the problem of identity, but is obliged to admit that all three are unsatisfactory, W proposes a single solution to herself, and in the course of the play describes her growing sense of its inadequacy. The solution, as

we have seen, is to find someone as much like herself as possible-- someone who could help her to define who she is and what purpose her life is meant to serve. But just as W retreats from the world to the sanctuary of her room in the first part of the play, despairing of ever being able to find such a person, so in the second and third parts she tells of her fruitless efforts to discover that other person in one of the windows across the way.²⁸

In the fourth part of the play, unable to find another creature like herself in windows most of whose blinds are drawn, W abandons her attempts to define her identity. Like the Unnamable, she has discovered that the words that say "I" lie beyond the limits of human knowledge. She has now decided to be her "own other living soul" (Ro, p. 281), which solves the problem of loneliness, though not the problem of identity. Rather than grapple with the latter problem any longer, she prefers to end her life in the arms of her mother's rocker (the opening stage directions tell us that its "inward curving arms . . . suggest embrace" (Ro, p. 273)), crooning to herself,

rock her off
stop her eyes
fuck life
stop her eyes
rock her off
rock her off (Ro, p. 282)

As S.E. Gontarski has observed, the phrase "fuck life" saves the play from becoming "effusively sentimental. It is saved from that fate by [W's words of defiance], and [by] the stylized, poetic nature of the narrative--the ellipsis and repetition--which helps create not a realistic exposition but an obviously formal construct."²⁹ Though the title Rockaby may suggest that W is "off her rocker," W's "fuck

life" conveys, significantly, that she has sufficient control over her mental faculties to voice her defiance of death.³⁰

In Catastrophe the main character, Protagonist, also refuses to accept death passively. As Michael Guest has observed, the play's other characters, Director, Assistant and the lighting-director Luke, are engaged in an artistic act of creation that is at first sight analagous to the account of Creation in Genesis, but is ultimately concerned with death.³¹

The cigar-smoking Director's first command is . . . for 'Light'; further such calls for light, and repetitions of 'For God's sake' assist to build a conception of the Director as God, while sustaining his theatrical gestus of a bourgeois . . . impresario. His identity with the Creator is further effected by his command over language and light, determining the structure of the play so as to conform to the order of Creation, and by the inclusion of a lighting technician named Luke.

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The presence of Luke, like an inspired Gospelsist, receiving the will of Director-Creator, translated to intelligible terms by Assistant-Angel, completes the absurd metaphysical motif.³²

Director creates "by a method of subtraction, in the way that a statue is created (hence the black box on which he stands is referred to as a 'plinth' and a 'pedestal')." ³³ On Director's instructions, Assistant removes his hat and dressing gown to reveal that he is wearing "[a]sh" (Ca, p. 297) coloured pyjamas underneath.³⁴ The fact that his small amount of remaining hair is also the colour of ash suggests, in association with the funeral service in The Book of Common Prayer--"We therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . ." ³⁵--that Director's act of creation is in fact one of decreation, an act that charts

Protagonist's progress towards death. Our sense that Protagonist's end is nigh is strengthened by Director's instruction that his flesh is to be whitened--to be made corpse-like--and that his hands are to be exposed, in order to make it clear that they have been subject to "[f]ibrous degeneration" (Ca, p. 298). At the moment of catastrophe--the moment in classical tragedy when the destruction of the main character is clearly imminent³⁶--Protagonist's fists are not to be clenched, and his head is to be bowed, in passive acceptance of his fate. Protagonist, however, submits to Director's instructions only once: the second time the catastrophe is to be enacted, he "raises his head, fixes the audience," and reduces the "[d]istant storm of applause" (Ca, p. 301) to an embarrassed silence. As Michael Guest has observed, Director wants to convey to the audience Macbeth's comment that

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.³⁷

Protagonist, however, refuses to be a party to this. Though prevented by the limits of human knowledge from asserting with absolute certainty that life has meaning and purpose, he is nevertheless determined to suggest that it can be lived with dignity.

Catastrophe is dedicated to the dissident Czech playwright Vaclav Havel, who was imprisoned for many years for his political beliefs.³⁸ It is possible to find a political dimension to the play, as the Polish critic Antoni Libera has;³⁹ however, in the light of Beckett's previous work, the play's political message seems secondary

to its more generalised concern with the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge.

3

In Ohio Impromptu we are concerned with the death not of an on-stage character, as in A Piece of Monologue, Rockaby and Catastrophe, but of a character described in the story that one on-stage character, Reader, reads to the other, Listener. Though Listener says nothing while the story is being read, he occasionally knocks on the table to signal that certain passages are to be re-read. Since there is no other dialogue, the play invites us to consider the kind of relationship that exists between the on-stage characters on the one hand and the story's characters on the other. That relationship has an important bearing on the relationship Beckett establishes in the play between art and the limits of human knowledge.

The story concerns a nameless character who for some time has been grieving over the death of his lover or mistress (the sex of the departed is not specified). "In a last attempt to obtain relief," Reader tells us, he has moved "from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far bank. From its single window he could see the downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans. . . . Day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet. . . . In his long black coat no matter what the weather and old world Latin Quarter hat" (OI, pp. 285-86).⁴⁰ Neither Reader nor the silent Listener comments on the story as it is being read: the only clues we have to its meaning lie within the story itself.

Thus, we may find it significant that the Isle of Swans is an island in Paris that features, at its downstream extremity, "a much reduced . . . replica of one of Frédéric August Bartholdi's most famous works, the Statue of Liberty."⁴¹ This information, when imported from outside the play, may suggest to us that the Isle of Swans represents a "new world" to its grieving character, a world to which he brings memories of the "old world" he knew in the company of the person he loved.⁴² "At the tip he would always pause to dwell on the receding stream," Reader continues. "How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on" (OI, p. 286). Here, in the absence of comment from either Reader or Listener, we might infer that the sight of the two confluent arms of the Seine recalls happy memories to the nameless character's mind; however, as Reader subsequently makes clear, it does not afford him the relief he seeks.⁴³

"In his dreams," Reader says, "he had . . . [s]een the dear face and heard the unspoken words, Stay where we were so long alone together, my shade will comfort you" (OI, p. 286). That the "dear face" should appear in this way to bring comfort to the character is not surprising to the reader or spectator familiar with the work of Jung, for the idea that dreams serve to correct psychological imbalance is an important aspect of Jungian theory.⁴⁴ For the character to move back to where he formerly lived is, however, out of the question, and in his new room, away from once-familiar surroundings, he is extremely unhappy. "White nights," says Reader, "[were] now again his portion. As when his heart was young. No sleep . . . till . . . dawn of day" (OI, p. 286).

Though we are never told whether the departed loved one is male or female, the phrase "White [i.e., sleepless] nights now again his portion" recalls a passage in Ecclesiastes: "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which [God] hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life . . ."⁴⁵ Thus when Reader goes on to tell how one night a stranger appeared to the story's character, "and said, I have been sent by--and here he named the dear name--to comfort you" (OI, p. 287), it might seem that we are being told a story about the benevolence of God. Yet this is not the only way of accounting for the stranger's arrival: it is equally possible that he is a figment of the character's imagination, created to provide psychological comfort. S.E. Gontarski has argued, accordingly, that "Ohio Impromptu finally brings to the fore the elemental creative process . . . suggested in That Time, where the protagonist of narrative A would hide as a youth, 'making up talk breaking up two or more talking to himself being together that way,' or in Endgame, where Hamm talks of 'the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together in the dark.'"⁴⁶

While there may be other ways of interpreting the arrival of the stranger, Beckett denies us the possibility of a single, definitive interpretation by restricting the amount of information Reader makes available to us. Why the stranger appears "from time to time unheralded . . . to read the sad tale through again and the long night away"; why "[w]ith 'never a word exchanged [he and the story's character grow] to be as one"; and why the stranger arrives one night to say, "I have had word from--and here he named the dear name

--that I shall not come again" (OI, p. 287) are aspects of the story that are also impossible to account for with certainty.

Like Endgame and Come and Go before it, Ohio Impromptu is a puzzle, and one of the most puzzling things about it is the very crucial relationship between the characters in the story and the two characters on stage. The fact that one of the on-stage characters is reading and the other listening, like the two men in the story; and that Reader and Listener are, as the stage directions tell us, "[a]s alike in appearance as possible" (OI, p. 285), where the story's characters "[grow] to be as one" (OI, p. 287), suggests that Reader's story is about the two characters who appear before us on stage. But to accept this too readily is to be a "gentle skimmer": there is simply not enough evidence for us to be certain that Reader and Listener are to be identified with the story's two characters so neatly.

What Beckett is offering us in Ohio Impromptu is a play that resembles the figures used in the psychological experiments early this century to establish the principle of closure.⁴⁷ In effect, the play is like a triangle with only two vertices joined together, or a circle whose circumference is flawed by a gap. Just as the people who participated in the experiments felt impelled to fill in the gaps for the sake of forming an intelligible whole, so we do, too; yet in the process we run the risk of simplifying or distorting our experience of what is happening on stage.

The fact that the costumes and set of Ohio Impromptu are exclusively black and white calls to mind the figure-ground experiments performed by the Danish psychologist, Edgar Rubin. From Chapters Four and Eight we recall that Rubin "examined critically his

own and others' experiences in the presence of . . . black contours on a white background," and noted that, in the act of perception, we assign greater prominence to one or the other--so that either the black is "figure" and the white "ground," or vice-versa.⁴⁸

Similarly, when we read Ohio Impromptu or see it performed on stage, the way we interpret the play will vary depending on the details we assign either greater or lesser importance. If the resemblance between the two on-stage characters and the two in the story strikes us especially forcibly, we will conclude that the story is about Reader and Listener. Yet it is equally possible that the story is quite unrelated to the characters on stage: Listener may well be a writer of fiction and Reader his amanuensis, seen reading back the work the former has just completed. Moreover, if we bring to Ohio Impromptu the knowledge that Beckett served for a time as Joyce's amanuensis; that the two men used to walk together on the Isle of Swans during the thirties; and that Joyce used to wear a Latin Quarter hat, we may find an autobiographical dimension to the play.⁴⁹

A further possibility, however, is that Listener is not a writer at all, but simply a man who likes to be read to: he may be a perfectly harmless figure, or he may be, like the madman at the end of Waugh's A Handful of Dust, a tyrant who demands that Reader devote his life to entertaining him. But again, there is no compelling reason to assume that there are two characters on stage, for the presence of a single hat on the table suggests that there one of the characters is the other's projection of mind.⁵⁰

In Ohio Impromptu, on a smaller scale than in Endgame, Beckett is presenting us with a puzzle analagous to what Schopenhauer refers to as the "riddle" (WWI, II, 392) posed by our infinitely complex

world. Such are the limits of human knowledge that neither the puzzle nor the riddle will ever be definitively solved: Ohio Impromptu resists our attempts to interpret it definitively, just as the world at large does.

4

Beckett's most recent play, What Where, is also a puzzle, and like various other Beckett works, demands that we be aware of its affinities with his earlier novels and plays. Thus it is important to recognise, as Linda Ben-Zvi does, the various resemblances between What Where and Rough for Radio II.⁵¹ Where Rough for Radio II presents us with the character Fox being tortured by a silent character named Dick, What Where features four characters--Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom--acting alternately as torturers and victims. Animator serves in Beckett's radio play as the governing faculty of a mind seeking to extract from one of its components certain key words--perhaps the words that say "I"; similarly, in What Where, the voice (or, in the television version prepared under Beckett's supervision, the image) of Bam stands for the Self in a mind whose secondary components are Bem, Bim, and Bom.⁵² Though Ben-Zvi does not mention it, Bam's voice is in Beckett's own words "something from beyond the grave:"⁵³ in presenting us with a dramatised account of the actions of the other characters during spring, summer, autumn and winter, Bam is recalling the activities of his own mind either during a single year of his lifetime, or during its four "seasons"--childhood, young manhood, middle age, and old age, respectively. The latter

possibility suggests that the play is in some way related to the riddle of the Sphinx.⁵⁴

In What Where it is implicit that Bam has devoted a lifetime not to that riddle, however, but to Schopenhauer's "riddle of the world" (WWI, II, 392)--the answer to which, if attainable, would reveal "why the world exists, and is just the kind of world it is" (WWI, II, 360). But the answer to the riddle of the world lies beyond human reach, for, as we have seen in earlier chapters, it can only be found by securing absolutely certain answers to an infinite number of physical and metaphysical questions. No human mind is equal to the task of asking such questions and evaluating the answers to be sure of their absolute accuracy: the only mind capable of it is the mind of God.

Bam's preoccupation with "what" and "where" is consistent with having spent a lifetime asking himself questions. Significantly, though, he seems little interested in "why," "when," "how," and "who," the other "serving-men" so helpful, as Kipling tells us, to anyone who is curious about the world around him:

I keep six honest serving-men
 (They taught me all I knew);
 Their names are What and Why and When
 And How and Where and Who.
 I send them over land and sea,
 I send them east and west;
 But after they have worked for me,
I give them all a rest.

I let them rest from nine till five,
 For I am busy then,
 As well as breakfast, lunch, and tea,
 For they are hungry men:
 But different folk have different views;
 I know a person small--
 She keeps ten million serving-men,
 Who get no rest at all!
 She sends 'em abroad on her own affairs,

From the second she opens her eyes--
 One million Hows, two million Wheres,
 And seven million Whys!⁵⁵

Here Kipling presents us with a bemused account of how curiosity dulls with age. Kipling's adult gives his "serving-men" a temporary rest because they have already answered a great many questions for him; similarly, Bam has given certain questions a permanent rest because he has recognised the futility of ever answering them with absolute certainty. Thus, it would seem that he ceased to ask "who?" upon discovering, as the narrator of The Unnamable does, that the problem of identity is insoluble--that the words cannot be found to say "I." Similarly, he may well have abandoned his efforts to discover "how"--how to solve the riddle of the world--at the point where he realised that searching for the solution would entail an eternity of questioning. Presumably it became clear to him then that there could be no guarantee as to "when" his questioning would end, and no guarantee, either, that the answers would tell him definitively "why"--"why the world exists, and is just the kind of world it is." At that stage he appears to have decided that he would concentrate on simple perceptual questions--questions of "what" and "where."

In "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" Belacqua "flog[s] . . . his coenaesthesia to enwomb him" (D, p. 109). Similarly, at the start of What Where the voice of Bam the "incurious seeker"⁵⁶--the seeker who realises that the answer to the riddle of the world cannot be found--describes how in "spring" (whether in a real season, or in a "season" of his life is not clear) he set one component of his mind, Bim, the task of torturing "what" (WW, p. 313) out of another component,

Bom.⁵⁷ Bam seems to realise that our perceptual faculties always present us with a simplified version of what exists in the world around us, but hopes, nonetheless, that torture might give rise to a vision of what the world is really like. In "summer" Bim returns, only to find that, despite his instructions, Bam had expected him to extract not "what" but "[w]here" (WW, p. 314) from Bom. In a rage, Bam arranges to have Bim taken away and tortured by Bem, who is to exact from Bim the confession that Bom did say "where." Bam's anger and his inconsistency about what he had expected Bim to do are not surprising, because by this point in the play it has become evident that Bam's is a troubled mind.⁵⁸ At some stage it has cracked under the strain of trying to answer the unanswerable riddle of the world.

Now, the "journey" (WW, p. 316) of his life over, Bam devotes himself to dramatising his failure. Where Kipling sends his serving-men "east and west," "over land and sea" to answer his questions, Bam summons Bem, Bim and Bom from three directions in memory to report on their activities. He begins by having them mime what is to follow, the mime recalling to mind the Mousetrap in Hamlet; in What Where, however, the idea is not to "catch the conscience of the king," but to puzzle the audience and whet its appetite for what follows.⁵⁹ Bam plays the role of an omnipotent God in what follows, switching on the lights and commenting "Good" (WW, p. 311 and passim) in a way that reminds us of the opening verses of Genesis. Acting the role of artistic God of creation is clearly a matter of compensating for his failure to account for the complexities of the world. He deliberately remains an inscrutable God, a God who performs but does not explain. "Make sense who may" (WW, p. 316) he says in the play's penultimate line: the play he has presented is a puzzle for the

audience that, like Endgame, Come and Go and Ohio Impromptu, is meant to serve as a counterpart to the puzzle posed by the infinitely complex world at large.

5

Beckett's most recent stage plays explore the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge in a variety of interesting ways. In questioning whether we can be absolutely certain about the existence and benevolence of God, A Piece of Monologue takes us back to Murphy and the idea of "ripping up old stories," as well as to the various "shape of ideas" plays. Rockaby and Catastrophe emphasise that we cannot be certain that life is meaningful, but present us with the spectacle of human dignity in the face of life's possible lack of meaning; while Ohio Impromptu and What Where present us with puzzles that serve as counterparts to the endless complexity of the world at large. Each of these plays refers us back, in one way or another, to earlier Beckett works, reminding us that Beckett's preoccupation with art and the limits of human knowledge has extended throughout his writing career.

NOTES

¹In "Beckett's Fundamental Theatre," in Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 96, n2, Charles Lyons provides a convenient summary of when the stage plays were written, first performed and first published. The following is a direct quotation from Lyons; I have included some additional information in square brackets:

A Piece of Monologue. Written in English for actor David Warrilow and performed by him in New York in 1980. First published in Kenyon Review, NS1, No. 3 (Summer 1979), 1-4. [Trans. into French as Solo and first published in Solo suivi de Catastrophe (Paris: Minuit, 1982). Although Lyons says that the play was written for Warrilow, in Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater (N.Y.: Oxford U.P., 1987), pp. 113-14, Enoch Brater reveals that "Beckett did not actually write A Piece of Monologue for Warrilow, but he did later say that he did not at all mind if the actor 'says so.'" Brater bases this statement on a comment made to him by Rosette Lamont in October 1984. (See p. 187, n5)].

Rockaby. Written originally in English, 1980. First performed in Buffalo, New York, [8 April 1981]. First published in 1981 [in Rockaby and Other Short Pieces (New York: Grove Press). Trans. into French as Berceuse and published in Catastrophe et autres dramatiques. (See Breon Mitchell, "A Beckett Bibliography: New Works 1976-1982," Modern Fiction Studies, 29 (Spring 1983), 146; and S.E. Gontarski, The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1985), p. 216, n10)].

Ohio Impromptu. Written originally in English, 1980. First performed at Ohio State University, 9 May 1981. First published in 1981 [in Rockaby and Other Short Pieces (New York: Grove Press). Trans. into French as Impromptu d'Ohio and published in Catastrophe et autres dramatiques. (See Mitchell, 146)].

Catastrophe. Written originally in French, 1982. First performed at Avignon Festival, 1982. Dedicated to Vaclav Havel. [First published in French in Solo suivi de Catastrophe. (See Mitchell, 147)]. First published [in English] in The New Yorker (10 Jan. 1983), 26-27.

What Where. Written originally in [French as Quoi où]. First performed in New York, Harold Clurman Theatre, 15 June 1983. [First published in French as Quoi où (Paris: Minuit, 1983). English translation first published in Evergreen Review, 98 (1984), 47-51].

Lyons does not mention the four television plays Beckett has written since Footfalls, which are:

Ghost Trio. Written in English in 1975. First published in Ends and Odds (New York: Grove Press, 1976). First televised on BBC2 on 17 April 1977. Trans. as Geister Trio for broadcast on Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 1 November 1977. (See Mitchell, 134; Beryl Fletcher et al., A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 210; and James Knowlson, "Ghost Trio/Geister Trio," in Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context, ed. Enoch Brater (N.Y.: Oxford U.P., 1986), p. 205, n2).

. . . but the clouds . . . Written in English in 1976. First published in Ends and Odds (London: Faber & Faber, 1977). First televised on BBC2 on 17 April 1977. Trans. as Nur noch Gewölke in 1977 for broadcast on German television. (See Mitchell, 136; Beryl Fletcher et al., A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 217; and Brater, p. 103).

Quad. First broadcast as Quadrat I & II on Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 8 October 1981. First published in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). (See Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater, p. 107).

Nacht und Träume. Written for and produced by Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 1982. First broadcast on 19 May 1983. First published in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). (See Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater, p. 103).

²See "Appendix 2: Beckett's Late Television Plays."

³All quotations from A Piece of Monologue are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by APM.

⁴In "The Rip Word in A Piece of Monologue," Modern Drama, 25 (Sept. 1982), 354, n3, Kristin Morrison rightly observes that although Speaker uses the third person to describe the individual who performs the ritual, he is in fact describing himself. "The narrator," says Morrison, "is dressed exactly like the character he describes; he shares his space with a bed and a lamp like those in his narrative. He differs only, and significantly, from the character in his story by the fact that he does not mimic the physical actions recounted, but stands motionless, staring straight ahead toward the audience."

⁵Morrison, 349, correctly identifies the "rip word" as "begone." (See APM, p. 269: "Waiting on the rip word. Stands there staring beyond at that black veil lips quivering to half-heard words. Trying to treat of other matters. Till half hears there are no other matters. . . . Never but the one matter. The dead and gone. . . .")

The word begone.") It is also consistent with the text to suggest, as Linda Ben-Zvi does in "The Schismatic Self in A Piece of Monologue," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 7 (Spring 1982), 15, that the rip word is a "pun on R.I.P., requiescat in pace. . .").

⁶Morrison, 349, notes that the Compact Oxford English Dictionary gives "To open up, rake up, bring up again into notice or discussion (esp. something unpleasant or which is to a person's discredit)" as one of the meanings of "rip"; however, she does not mention that the phrase "ripping up old stories" is used in this sense. The OED lists a number of authors who speak of "ripping up old stories" or "old faults," "old secrets," or "old grievances." The examples I offer, from Fielding and Byron, are not included in the list.

⁷Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (1749; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p. 458.

⁸"The Vision of Judgement" (1822); rpt. in English Romantic Poetry and Prose, ed. Russell Noyes (N.Y.: Oxford U.P., 1956), p. 921. On p. 921, n36, Noyes notes that "John Wilkes, 1727-97, [was a] turbulent publicist and politician, who headed the opposition to George III and the Tories." In n37, he adds that "Wilkes, who had several times been expelled from parliament, succeeded finally in having all orders of his expulsion stricken from the record."

⁹Jane Alison Hale, The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue U.P., 1987), p. 116, notes that Speaker's vision is reminiscent of Clov's in Endgame. (See Endgame, p. 17, where Clov reports that he has a vision of "my light dying" when he goes into his kitchen and stares at the wall).

¹⁰The Merchant of Venice IV.i.184-86 and 194-97. Brater, p. 120, also notes the echoes of Portia's speech in the play, but says nothing of her comments about God's mercy.

¹¹Cf. James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 276, where, as we saw in Chapter Nine, Bloom reflects how cruel it is (of God, implicitly) to allow "people [to] get fond of each other: lure them on. Then tear asunder."

¹²Ben-Zvi, 11, notes that Speaker "has survived '[t]wo and a half billion seconds' and '[t]hirty thousand nights' [APM, p. 265]. This actually works out to 79 years of seconds and 82 years of nights, [respectively] . . ."

¹³There Pozzo says, "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (WG, p. 89). Brater, p. 124, and Morrison, p. 350, also note that Speaker echoes this line.

¹⁴Similarly, as we saw in Chapter Ten, the fading but never wholly extinguished light in Breath represents not the life of a single individual, but the lives of successive human generations.

¹⁵Richard II III.ii.160-70. "Birth the death of him," says Speaker at one point. "That nevoid smile" (APM, p. 267). The idea that the smile is both a birthmark and a deathmark calls to mind two of Beckett's favourite lines of verse, by the Spanish poet Calderon: "The greatest crime of man/ Is that he ever was born." As we saw in the last chapter, Beckett quotes these lines in the original Spanish in "Proust" (P, p. 67); they appear in various places in The World as Will and Idea, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909), most notably in the first volume, where Schopenhauer asks rhetorically: "Why should [birth] not be a crime, since, according to an eternal law, death follows upon it?" (I, 458).

¹⁶Cf. Endgame (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), p. 35, where Hamm says to his father, Nagg: "Scoundrelé Why did you engender me?" Here and elsewhere in the play Speaker is implicitly asking why the individual human life should be like this.

¹⁷See APM, p. 268, where, in describing the vision a second time, he says: "Cry. Snuffed with breath of nostrils."

¹⁸As we saw in the last chapter, this passage is also echoed in the last speech in That Time (TT, p. 235).

¹⁹Cp. Samuel Beckett, Solo, in Catastrophe et autres dramatiques (Paris: Minuit, 1982), p. 36.

²⁰See "Maccabees, The," in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature (London: Oxford U.P., 1970), p. 348.

²¹Cp. Solo, p. 34. For the link with Schopenhauer (through Calderon), see note 15.

²²Solo, p. 32.

²³It is given as "Elle tombe du ciel, comme une pluie douce, sur le lieu qu'elle domine" in William Shakespeare, Théâtre complet, trans. Jean-François-Victor Hugo (1859-65; rpt. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961), II, 144; as "Elle tombe comme la douce pluie du ciel sur le lieu placé au-dessous d'elle" in William Shakespeare, Oeuvres complètes, trans. M. Guizot (Paris: Didier, 1874), VI, 72; and as "Elle descend du ciel sur la terre comme une pluie bienfaisante" in William Shakespeare, Oeuvres dramatiques, trans. Benjamin Laroche (Paris: Editeurs du magasin théâtral, 1839), I, 290). (For information about these translations of Portia's speech I am indebted to Professor Victor Graham of the University of Toronto French Department).

²⁴Cp. Solo, pp. 33 and 35. It should be noted that "first word" appears twice in APM, p. 268. The opening of the Gospel of St. John in La Sainte Bible (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1956), p. 1397, is very similar to the English: "Au commencement le Verbe était et le Verbe était avec Dieu et le Verbe était Dieu."

²⁵Cp. Solo, pp. 35, 36.

²⁶Cp. Solo, pp. 35, 36. The passage "Faint cry in his ear. Mouth agape. Closed with hiss of breath. Lips joined. Feel soft touch of lip on lip. Lip lipping lip. Then parted by cry as before" (APM, p. 268) echoes a passage in the "Proteus" episode of Ulysses, where Joyce says of Stephen Dedalus: "His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her womb. Oomb, allwombing tomb" (Ul, p. 53). The close association of womb and tomb in Ulysses parallels Speaker's statement that "Birth was the death of him" (APM, p. 265 and passim). (This passage in "Proteus" is also echoed in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," where Belacqua finds that his mind goes "wombtomb" (D, p. 39) when he engages in meditation).

²⁷All quotations from Rockaby are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by Ro.

²⁸In the first production of the play, W was (on Beckett's instructions) given a ring to wear, for the sake of suggesting "'a past engagement'" (Brater, p. 174); it may be that she is partly based on Dickens' Miss Havisham, as Footfalls' May is.

²⁹Gontarski, p. 179.

³⁰Brater, p. 170, and Hale, p. 142, both suggest that the play's title is partly linked to the expression "off her rocker"; Hale, p. 133, also finds a link between the title and the word "good-bye." Brater, p. 174, says that during rehearsals of the play, Beckett stressed above all that "'it is a lullaby.'" He (Brater) also notes that "[i]n French Rockaby is called Berceuse, a title which invokes the triple meanings of cradle, lullaby, and rocking chair" (p. 175), and he quotes Alan Schneider, Beckett's American director, as saying that Rockaby is "'not about dying. . . . It's about accpeting death'" (p. 175).

³¹Michael Guest, "Catastrophe and the Artistic Act of Creation," Journal of Beckett Studies, No. 13 [forthcoming]. The page numbers of quotations given here are typescript page numbers.

³²Ibid., pp. 11, 16.

³³Ibid., p. 3.

³⁴All quotations from Catastrophe are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by Ca.

³⁵The Book of Common Prayer (Burial of the Dead. First Anthem). Quoted in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (London: Oxford U.P., 1969), p. 168.

³⁶Lyons, p. 91, comments that "The term 'catastrophe,' which includes the idea of a dramatic . . . process working towards the death or destruction of the principal character, is obviously one that would intrigue Samuel Beckett."

³⁷Macbeth V.v.24-28.

³⁸See Brater, p. 139.

³⁹In "Beckett's Catastrophe," Modern Drama, 28 (Sept. 1985), 346, Libera comments that the play "has its roots in a very concrete reality, the reality of Communism which reigns in the countries of Eastern Europe."

⁴⁰All quotations from Ohio Impromptu are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); page numbers are given in the text, preceded by OI.

⁴¹Pierre Astier, "Beckett's Ohio Impromptu: a View from the Isle of Swans," Modern Drama, 25 (Sept. 1982), 337.

⁴²Astier, 338, comments, similarly, that the story's character "remains a hopeless prisoner of his 'old world' thoughts, unable ever to open his mind to a 'new world' of ideas."

⁴³Astier, 337, comments that for the story's character, "the sight of the river, with its two arms reunited in 'joyous eddies' (after it has been split in the middle by the islet's upstream tip), is just a natural phenomenon. He does not see in it any symbol of division and reunion, as we do immediately . . ."

⁴⁴See C.G. Jung, "On the Nature of Dreams" (1948; rpt. in The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960)), p. 287.

⁴⁵Ecclesiastes 9.9. Brater, p. 132, observes that nuit blanche is French for a sleepless night, and adds that "White nights" is "also a pun on Whiteknights, the location of the Beckett Archive at the University of Reading. Such a meaning would be truly apposite for a play originally performed in America before an audience of Beckett specialists, many of whom had spent hours poring over the rich holdings at Whiteknights."

⁴⁶Gontarski, p. 178.

⁴⁷These were discussed in more detail at the beginning of Chapter Five.

⁴⁸George W. Hartmann, Gestalt Psychology (New York: Ronald Press, 1935), pp. 23-24.

⁴⁹See Brater, p. 126, and also Richard Ellman, James Joyce (London: Oxford U.P., 1966), pp. 661-62.

⁵⁰Bernard Beckerman makes this point in "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Listening," in Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context, p. 165. Similarly, in "Beckett's Auditors: Not I to Ohio Impromptu," in Beckett at 80/Beckett in Context, p. 188, Katharine Worth argues that the two characters are different aspects of a single writer.

⁵¹Samuel Beckett (Boston: G.K. Hall (Twayne English Authors), 1986)), pp. 182-83. The names of two of the characters, says Ben-Zvi, are those of the torturers Bom and Bem in How It Is, and of the sadistic male nurses in Murphy, Bim and Bom Clinch.

⁵²See Martha Fehsenfeld, "'Everything Out but the Faces': Beckett's Reshaping of What Where for Television," Modern Drama, 29 (June 1986), 232-35, for a discussion of Beckett's decision to replace the megaphone or loudspeaker in the stage version of What Where with an image of Bam's face in the television version. In the same essay, 231, Fehsenfeld notes that Stanley Kauffman was perhaps the first critic to suggest that the play's characters "'are all parts of the same person. . . . It is as if the invisible Bam is an inner self governing visible behaviour--the self and the other--except that this time the other is fragmented'" (Quoted from Saturday Review, (Jan.-Feb. 1984), 9).

⁵³Quoted in Brater, p. 156.

⁵⁴In The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), II, 10, Robert Graves states that the Sphinx asked wayfarers: "'What being, with only one voice, has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?' Those who could not solve the riddle she throttled and devoured on the spot . . . Oedipus, [however], guessed the answer. 'Man,' he replied, 'because he crawls on all fours as an infant, stands firmly on his two feet in his youth, and leans upon a staff in his old age.'" Fehsenfeld, 234, notes that in the television production the face of the character Bam is younger than the face that represents the voice of Bam. While this might suggest that Bam is reviewing the events of a recent year of his life from beyond the grave, it is also possible that he is reviewing his whole life.

⁵⁵Rudyard Kipling, poem without title at the conclusion of "The Elephant's Child," in Just So Stories (1902; rpt. New York: Weathervane Books, 1978), p. 66. Beckett would surely be familiar with this poem from boyhood.

⁵⁶Molloy, p. 64.

⁵⁷All quotations from What Where are from Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); quotations are given in the text, preceded by WW.

⁵⁸That Bam is not possessed of all his faculties may seem evident from the first line of the play: "We are the last five" (WW, p. 310).

⁵⁹Brater, p. 157, notes that the "dumb show" preceding the spoken part of the play appears to derive from Hamlet. The lines, "The play's the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king," spoken by Hamlet, occur in Hamlet II.ii.633-34.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BEGINNING TO END

Bam's preoccupation with the fact that perception gives rise to simplification and distortion, and his awareness that the world at large is too complex to admit of definitive explanation, take us back to the essays Beckett wrote on Joyce and Proust at the beginning of his career. In the Proust essay Beckett deals--albeit obliquely--with the French novelist's Schopenhauerian conviction that everyday perception presents us with a partial view of the world; in addition, he draws attention to the advantages and disadvantages of involuntary memory as a solution to the problems involved. Overall, Beckett is concerned to demonstrate that Proust makes original use of Schopenhauer's theory of music--a theory arising from Schopenhauer's views on perception--in writing his masterpiece, A la recherche du temps perdu. Originality, argues Beckett, both there and in his earlier essay on Joyce, is a function of the limitations of human knowledge: it is because neither Joyce nor Proust is possessed of the omniscience and omnipotence of God that A la recherche du temps perdu and "Work in Progress" are not wholly original works. Yet the two writers are as original as is humanly possible; they are original in the sense that they make innovative use of received materials.

In his subsequent writings, Beckett strives to be original in the same sense. In his first short story, "Assumption," he adapts Stephen Dedalus' dedication to silence, exile and cunning to a work

of fiction concerned with the desirability of withdrawing from the world for the sake of attaining to transcendent truths; while in his next work, the unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," he draws on Chaucer, Tennyson and and Henry Williamson for much the same purpose. In More Pricks Than Kicks, Beckett fashions a latter-day comic epic out of the not-altogether-satisfactory "Dream of Fair to Middling Women," adding depth to that novel by adapting the work of Henry Fielding and James Joyce to it in a thoroughly original way. More Pricks Than Kicks is a comic epic of relativism in that it derives inspiration from the use of epic conventions in such novels as Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones and Ulysses; yet it is an original work in the sense that it differs in scale from Ulysses, and demonstrates, as Fielding's novels do not, that the modern world is characterised by the "absolute absence" (J, p. 33) of absolute values.

While More Pricks Than Kicks promises greatness, Beckett's next novel, Murphy, is his first fictional masterpiece. In Murphy Beckett puts his theory of the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge--a theory by now developed not only in the Joyce and Proust essays, but in a number of subsequent essays and reviews--successfully into practice, demonstrating in an original work that the world is too complex to admit of definitive answers to metaphysical questions. His next novel Watt, also a great work of literature, takes this point further by presenting us with a complex puzzle that serves as a counterpart to the infinitely complex world at large.

In the forties Beckett began writing in French. A desire to be original--to escape, in particular, the stylistic influence of Joyce--may be discerned behind this. However, in both the theory and

practice of his art, Beckett remained committed to the idea that the world is too complex to admit of definitive interpretation, as is evident from his essays on the van Veldes and from his practice in his earliest French fiction--the four Nouvelles and the novel Mercier and Camier. Beckett developed his views on the limits of knowledge even further in his "Three Dialogues" with Georges Duthuit, in which it emerges more clearly than in previous essays that the mind as well as the world is infinitely complex. In his truly great work of fiction, the trilogy Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable, he puts that aspect of his theory into practice, demonstrating that it is impossible to write satisfactorily about the nature and structure of the human mind.

After the trilogy, Beckett began writing drama, and continued to focus upon the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge in his work for stage, screen and radio. His best-known play, Waiting for Godot, draws into question the existence and benevolence of God, as do his first play for radio, All That Fall, and various of his later plays, including That Time, Footfalls, Not I and A Piece of Monologue. His overall point in these plays is the point he makes in earlier works of fiction--particularly in More Pricks Than Kicks and Watt: it is that, while it is impossible to be certain that God does not exist, the ubiquitousness of human suffering suggests that either there is no God, or if there is, that He is shamefully indifferent to the welfare of His creatures.

The question of God's existence figures in other Beckett plays as well, but is overshadowed in some by his preoccupation with the infinite complexity of both the world and the mind. Thus in such plays as Endgame, Come and Go, Ohio Impromptu and What Where, Beckett

presents us with complex puzzles that, like Watt, are meant to parallel the puzzles the world and the mind themselves present. The complexities of the mind in particular occupy Beckett's attention in most of his radio plays--where the radio set itself often serves as a head, and the voices emanating from it as those of the mental components within in it. Similarly, in his one venture into cinema, Film, Beckett makes it clear how little self-perception can reveal about the mind, and in his best television play, Eh Joe, he focuses on the limitations that the mind can place on the extent of our knowledge. That preoccupation also surfaces in Happy Days and Play, his first stage plays of the sixties.

Beckett wrote a number of essays and reviews on art and literature at the beginning of his career not for the sake of developing a literary aesthetic, but for a variety of other reasons. Yet there emerges from these essays a consistent theory about the relationship between art and the limits of human knowledge that is worked out in practice in his early fiction and drama. What is truly fascinating about Beckett's writing is the range and variety of his art works--which include not only short stories and novels, but also plays for stage, screen and radio. A more versatile writer devoted to exploring a single major theme in his work, and to exploring it with as much originality as possible, is difficult to imagine. Beckett is one of the truly great writers of the twentieth century--a writer whose theory and practice both invites and repays careful study.

APPENDIX ONE

THE LADDER JOKE IN WATT

In The Novels of Samuel Beckett, John Fletcher takes issue with Jacqueline Hoefer, who had suggested in an article on Watt that the phrase "Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away," is a reference to the closing sentences of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: "'My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognises them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions, then he sees the world rightly. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.'"¹ Fletcher comments: "Jacqueline Hoefer supports her interpretation, which indeed would explain much in Watt, by the German pronunciation in 'I haf' and 'Ifor'. Unfortunately this interpretation is quite erroneous. Mr. Beckett told me in 1961 that the 'ladder' is a reference to 'a Welsh joke' (but he did not specify which), making the pronunciation not German but Welsh, and that he had only read the works of Wittgenstein 'within the last two years'."²

Intrigued by this comment about the Welsh joke, I placed a note in the "Information, Please" column of the Times Literary Supplement, 24 August 1973, 984, asking if anyone could tell me what the joke was. A Mr. D.O. Williams of St. Peter Port, Guernsey, wrote to say that the joke consists of two lines, a warning and a reply: "Do not

come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away." Reply: "It's too late, man, I'm already half way down." Confirmation of this reached me when I advertised again in a number of Welsh newspapers--The North Wales Weekly News, The South Wales Echo and The South Wales Evening Post. A Mr. L.O. Arridge wrote from Degany, Caernarvonshire, to say that he could remember hearing the joke before World War One, as did a Mr. Courtney Morgan from Cardiff. "This is not a set joke to sit down and relate," Mr. Morgan commented. "It's the type of banter and joking that goes on with high spirits amongst a crowd of friends." A Mr. Noel Egerton of Lisvane, near Cardiff, claimed that the joke was in fact a true story. "According to my father," said Mr. Egerton (who gave his own age in 1973 as fifty), "the story was a true one about a builder in my home town of Newtown, Montgomeryshire. . . . One day [he placed a long ladder against a house] and his 'roofer' took another, shorter roof ladder up with him, placed it in position along the roof and disappeared to carry out a repair. Because the building was very high the roofer couldn't be seen from the roadway where the builder stood. Then, for some reason, the builder wanted to use the specially long ladder for another job nearby--so he shouted 'Don't come down the ladder, George, I've taken it away--and at that moment, since the roofer was starting the descent along the roof ladder towards the top of the specially long ladder, he shouted 'Well, bring it back, I'm half way down'."

Richard Coe has described the joke as a "hoary Irish chestnut--which Beckett patriotically transposes into Welsh . . ."³ However, a Mr. J.I. Ellidge of Aborgele wrote to say that "The words 'Don't come down the ladder Mick I've taken it away' were very common in Southport [Lancashire] in the early 1920s and were still in use in

the mid 1940s. They were always in an Irish accent, or at any rate what the speaker thought was an Irish accent." Mr. Ellidge's letter, in conjunction with Mr. Egerton's, suggests that the joke was in fact Welsh in origin, but was later given an Irish flavour.

NOTES

¹See John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 87, and Jacqueline Hoefer, "Watt," first published in the Autumn 1959 number of Perspective; rpt. in Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 62-76.

²Fletcher, pp. 87-88.

³Richard Coe, Beckett (Edinburgh/ London: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), p. 46.

APPENDIX TWO

BECKETT'S LATE TELEVISION PLAYS

The four television plays Beckett wrote after Eh Joe--Ghost Trio, . . . but the clouds . . ., Quad and Nacht und Träume--are all relatively minor. Ghost Trio and . . . but the clouds . . ., written in the mid-seventies and first broadcast on the same programme in 1977, are televisual variations on his earlier radio play, Words and Music.¹ Where in Words and Music Croak summons to mind the face of a woman he once loved, in Ghost Trio the main character, F, awaits the arrival of an unnamed woman. At first it seems that the music we hear throughout the play emanates from a cassette the main character is holding; however, it eventually becomes clear that its source is not the cassette, but the man's mind. As in Words and Music, so in this play, music is a counterpart to emotion. Thus the rising and falling volume of the Beethoven piece in the background is a counterpart to the rising and falling emotions within the main character as hope gives way to doubt and then to an undefined mixture of feelings when it becomes clear to him that the woman will not come.

Music is absent from . . . but the clouds . . ., though, as in Words and Music, the main character is troubled by the memory of a woman he once knew. In the past, her image has appeared briefly to his mind's eye, then vanished; or has appeared and lingered; or has appeared and uttered a few inaudible words; or has simply refused to appear at all. On the night with which the play is concerned, the

image of the woman appears and, as her lips move, the man utters the words she is trying to speak, some lines from Yeats's "The Tower": " . . . but the clouds of the sky . . . when the horizon fades . . . or a bird's sleepy cry . . . among the deepening shades. . . . "² The lines are taken, in fact, from the last stanza of Yeats's poem:

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school
Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come--
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath--
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.³

Evidently the main character of this play is trying to make his peace with death--though whether with his own death or that of the woman is never made clear.⁴

Beckett's next two television plays, Quad and Nacht und Träume, are both devoid of dialogue. The former is an elaborate dance involving four characters: the four move around the perimeter and across the diagonals of a square, but for reasons never specified, are careful to avoid the area in the centre of it. Four complicated circuits around the square to the accompaniment of various percussion instruments are specified in the stage directions, and once the circuits have been completed, they are repeated. Martin Esslin has commented that in

the original typescript--merely titled Quad--these two movements comprised the entire work. In performance, however, a second part--Quadrat II--was added. The producer at Stuttgart, Reinhart Müller-Freienfels, has told me the story of

the genesis of Quadrat II. The recording, the first television piece by Beckett to use colour, had been completed; and in the evening Müller-Freienfels played the tape back to Beckett on his video-machine at home. Beckett liked the finished performance and Müller-Freienfels mentioned that it had also looked very good on the additional black-and-white monitor (that has to be present in any television studio so that the director can judge whether the picture is compatible for those viewers who don't have colour sets). Beckett was intrigued by this observation and suggested that they go back the next day to make a recording in black-and-white of only one complete circuit, but much slower and this time without the percussion accompaniment, the only sound being the shuffling of the four figures' feet. When this had been recorded and Beckett viewed it, he said: 'Good--this is a hundred thousand years lateré' And so with the addition of the black-and-white section Quad became Quadrat I & II.⁵

What the play is about is difficult to determine. "Are these figures in a Dantesque hell," asks Esslin, "doomed to repeat their prescribed circuit to all eternity? Or is the image that of all human destiny, where, seen from an objective vantage point outside ourselves, each of us has his preordained path on his journey through life and is thus destined to collide with all those whose preordained paths he is preordained to cross at preordained moments? And does the centre that must be avoided signify the impossibility of genuine contact between the endlessly journeying figures?"⁶ The play raises these questions and more, but teasingly refuses to answer them.

Nacht und Träume, Beckett's most recent television play, is also puzzling. Its title is that of a Schubert song, based on a short poem of eight lines by the Austrian poet, Heinrich Joseph von Collin (1771-1811):

Holy night, you do descend
And dreams descend as well,
Like the darkness throughout Space,
Into men's (human beings') silent, silent breast.

They listen to them with pleasure
And cry out, when day awakens:

Come again, you holy night,
Lovely dreams, oh come again.⁷

In the play, the camera focuses on a dreamer who, in his dream, pictures himself sitting at a table, bowed head in hands. His hands appear surrealistically, in disembodied form, from above. The left rests on his head; the right presents him with a cup to drink from, then with a cloth to wipe his brow. The music of the Schubert song plays hauntingly in the background of this television playlet.

As visual performances Nacht und Träume and the three other plays discussed here have a certain interest, but they lack depth and are clearly minor members of the Beckett canon. Far more substantial and interesting are the stage plays Beckett has written since Footfalls, which are discussed in Chapter Twelve.

NOTES

¹In A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), pp. 210 and 217, Beryl Fletcher et al. reveal that Ghost Trio and . . . but the clouds . . . were written in English in 1975 and October–November 1976, respectively, for BBC Television, and were first broadcast, together with a television version of Not I, on 17 April 1977.

². . . but the clouds . . ., in Samuel Beckett, Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p. 262.

³"The Tower," in The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 224–25.

⁴As Beryl Fletcher et al. point out in A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett, p. 218, the ambiguity of "when alive" in the following passage from . . . but the clouds . . . is what makes it unclear as to whether the main character is trying to make peace with his own death or that of the woman: ". . . she appeared and— . . . Lingered. 5 seconds. With those unseeing eyes I so begged when alive to look at me" (p. 260).

⁵Martin Esslin, "Towards the Zero of Language," in Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 44.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 45; translation by Martin Esslin.

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The editions of Beckett's works used in this thesis are listed below. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the reprints cited here rather than from the original editions.

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This list extends as far as L'Innommable, which Beckett completed in 1949. (The two items following it, Mercier et Camier

and Premier Amour, though published for the first time in 1970, were written in 1946. Similarly, Watt was first published in 1953, though Beckett finished work on it in 1945). For information about the fiction Beckett wrote after 1949, see the bibliographical references listed above.

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